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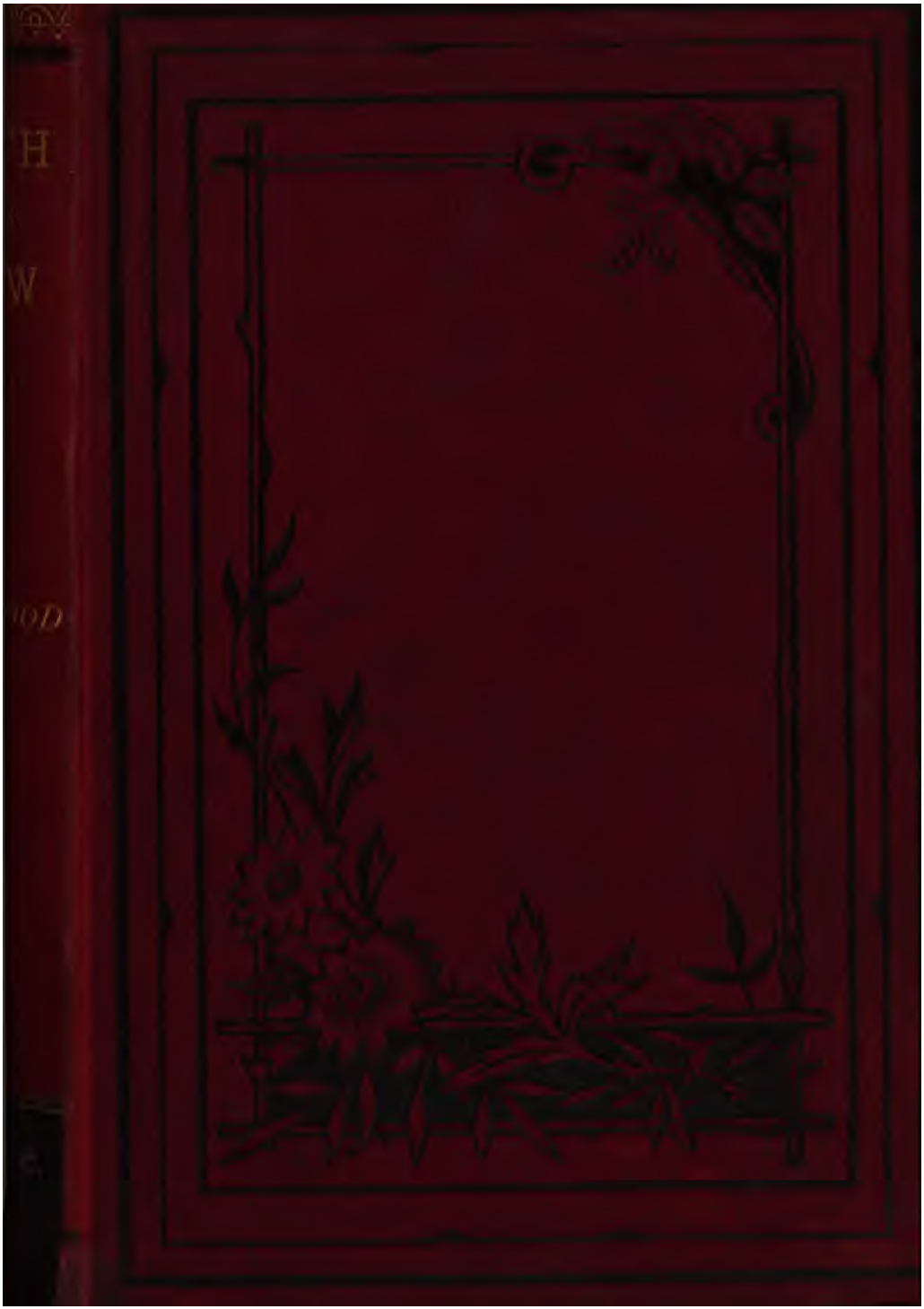
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YOUTH ON THE PROW.

YOUTH ON THE PROW.

A Novel.

By LADY WOOD.

AUTHOR OF "ROSEWARN," "SABINA,"
"ON CREDIT," "THROUGH FIRE AND WATER," "SHEEN'S FOREMAN,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.
1879.

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251. e. 933.

LONDON:
BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS, LONDON.

YOUTH ON THE PROW.

CHAPTER I.

"Youth on the prow, and pleasure at the helm."

I NEVER feel the powerlessness of words so much as in attempting a description of the human face. The vague features of a landscape may, when represented by word-painting, give the reader a tolerably accurate idea of the scene the artist would reproduce; but who can paint the ever-varying changes of the human countenance? I will try the easiest phase. My hero for the present is sleeping. His deep blue eyes are closed in the healthy sealing which shows no opening of the lids. His forehead is broad, and his nose of moderate length;

his upper lip short, and his face rich in colour, downy in youth and bronzed by exercise. Sir Atheline Vernon was eighteen, and having been carefully kept out of the way of all horses, nor even allowed to ride a pony, because his father had been killed in hunting, had, on first going to college, emancipated himself from maternal control, and was about to ride a race against some youths of his own years on the following morning.

"The dear old lady," said he to himself, as he fell asleep, "would not like it if she knew it; but, really, I cannot live on bread and milk all my life. Women know nothing," he added grandly, with the supercilious folly of eighteen; for the youths of all nations are alike in feelings, and whilst the young Hottentot shows his manhood by beating his mother with his club, civilised youth inflict pangs more acute, because they are mental, and not, like the marks of bruises, evanescent.

Sir Atheline rode one of his friend's horses, and, strange as it may seem, he won the race. How this happened I cannot pretend to say, but it was

an unfortunate success, having given the boy a taste of the pleasure of victory, of which he was never to enjoy the full draught. He never won another, though he backed his horses with mad recklessness, and rode them after the same fashion. He had been intended for the bar, for he had shown proofs of talent and culture at the public school where he had been placed; but the army was infinitely more attractive, and he wrung a reluctant consent from the "dear old lady," as he called her, that he should purchase a commission in the Cavalry. When he was in the plenitude of his delight at this concession to his wishes, he turned, and seeing the look of sadness in her face, always tender and soft-hearted, though reckless and wilful, he threw his arms round her neck, and declared that she should not be grieved by him. He would give up his own wishes for hers.

Of course Lady Vernon became as anxious then for the accomplishment of his desire as he could be, even more so,—and Sir Atheline obtained his commission in time to go out on service in the Crimean war.

His mother even, if she had anticipated the strain on her constitution occasioned by incessant anxiety, probably would have disregarded it. She grew weaker and weaker as the time went on. At last came the telegram—"The Light Brigade is cut to pieces." This was the death stroke: a succession of fainting fits terminated her life before she could hear that Sir Atheline Vernon had received a sword-cut on the left arm, and though severely wounded, was doing well. There was the pleasant addition that he had behaved with great gallantry. But the news fell on heedless ears. The imperturbable indifference which was fixed on the face which for a few hours had regained the contour of youth could never change till it dissolved in dust. A girl stood gazing with awe on the remains of friend and guardian; some lines by Wesley forced themselves upon her memory—

> "The tongue stiff and silent is grown,
> The pale lips move never again,
> The smile and the dimple are flown,
> And the voice both of pleasure and pain."

She wept bitterly over the loss of the tenderest

friend she had ever known, for Lady Vernon had taken charge of the orphan child of a school companion, and had carefully trained her in those virtues which she had been less successful in implanting in the mind of her more dearly loved son.

Nullum numen abest, si sit prudentia. "No god is absent where calm prudence dwells"—the lady would say to her pupil, Helena; and the girl assimilated the instruction into the constitution of her mind, and became even more rigidly virtuous than her instructress.

Carefully brought up girls have no perception of shades of colour in sin. An act is right or it is wrong—there is no medium between white and scarlet. "A drunkard and a wine-bibber cannot enter the kingdom of heaven;" therefore a young man who drinks a glassful or two in excess of his usual quantity is a reprobate beyond redemption. Luckily for Helena, she knew little of the career of her friend's son, but she had seen that beloved lady's face clouded with nameless anxieties, to which, Helena suspected, Sir Atheline's conduct had given rise;

but, to balance this, she remembered a thousand acts of unselfishness on his part which endeared him to her.

On one occasion, when they were children, he had gone to see Helena with his mother's permission, whilst she was staying with some friends. Helena was fond of figs, and Sir Atheline observed that when a small basketful was brought in by the gardener, with unusual rudeness they were appropriated by the other children, and Helena was left without any. Sir Atheline said nothing. He had seen, in coming up to the house, the entrance to the grounds of a professional gardener, and expended all his money in buying a magnificent present of ripe figs, which he carried off with him, and hid under the seat of a summerhouse in the garden of the mansion in which Helena was staying. Then he coaxed her out with him, his arm round her neck, and produced the delicious fruit. "There, dear! you shall have as many as you like now—and those greedy girls shall not taste one—they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

In after years, Helena's eyes would fill with tears in thinking of this incident. She did not then know that her youthful lover was penniless, and that Master Atheline walked home fifteen miles, not having wherewith to pay his railway ticket, and reached his paternal mansion with bleeding feet. He did not complain, and bore silently Lady Vernon's reproaches for his delay in returning; for, always anxious for his safety, she watched without ceasing from the time when the carriage had returned from the station without him till he appeared with dusty trowsers and wearied aspect. His sole refreshment had been a bit of new bread offered him by a cottager's wife, who was returning from the baking-house common to the row of small dwellings, and saw that the young gentleman looked with hungry eyes at her tray of smoking loaves.

As they grew older, Lady Vernon usually contrived that Helena should be absent when Sir Atheline was at home. She would not have objected to Helena as a daughter-in-law, but she had a dread lest he should engage himself to her

...e had been enough of society to know ... [illegible] and repenting of his vows should ... [illegible] of Helena's life, and shipwreck ... [illegible]. Helena had nothing but a ... of sixty pounds a-year for her fortune. ... Athelstane had a large house mortified ... Helena's prudence would have made a good ... [illegible] on an expenditure, should he prove ... [illegible], but the wise lady knew that Helena, at ... [illegible], was ten years older in character than ... [illegible] at twenty. She knew also that Athelstane ... [illegible] susceptible to female attraction, for ... [illegible] that wise head-master of Oldchester, ... [illegible] policemen in his pay, found that the Sir Athelstane aged sixteen used to wander in shady ... with a butterman's daughter, with whom he was probably exchanging vows of eternal constancy; and had not that vigilant but not too honourable head-master of Oldchester opened the boy's letters, both those he received and those he wrote—for which piece of jesuitism he earned the contempt of every honourable youth, —and found a piece of everlasting flower, tied up with the fair one's dark hair, which flower

seemed a melancholy tribute to the death of an attachment so ephemeral.

This pretty missive was not seen by the youth for whom it was intended, for the triumphant doctor sent it to the anxious mother, who, being a fond, foolish woman, was consoled in a way the doctor little suspected, namely, by believing that the correspondence was innocent, excepting that on the part of the butterman's daughter it indicated a desire to entice the young baronet into an early marriage.

Sir Atheline was considered very clever by his compeers in the classes. He could learn a Greek chorus, and put it into elegant English verse, sooner than any of his competitors; but he preferred cricket and boating to construing classics; and though he made great progress by starts, he slept on the way, or played so merrily with idle companions, that at the end of the half-year the dull boys were found to have passed him. He congratulated them with imperturbable good temper, and threatened to "take the wind out of their sails" on the following half-year. When the students, or so-called students,

met again, Sir Atheline's first occupation was to pay off the bills which had accumulated frightfully during his idleness in the previous half-year. Idleness means, as a rule, extravagance; close study distances temptation. Sir Atheline, fresh from the presence of that dear true-minded mother, was ashamed of his idleness and of the excesses which had made him draw so largely on her pocket. But he consoled himself with the thought that in a few years he should enjoy his own income, of which his niggardly guardians were so chary in his minority, and then that dearest, best of women should be made happy by his generosity. The happiness which his steadiness would have bestowed was much too irksome for him to yield. He should have abundant wealth, and that he would shower on the mother to whom it would be useless, excepting to restore to him, or to bequeath to his descendants.

It has been wisely observed by Paley, that whilst parents have a keen notion of what is due to them in the duties of their children, children have as keen a conviction of their

parents' duties to them. It seems to be the belief of the young that they are infinitely wiser than their elders. Of course they are, they think. The world has not stood still in the last forty years. Those dear old respectable twaddlers know not what life really is.

CHAPTER II.

"He heedeth not the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely."

Lady Vernon smiled sadly, detecting in the condescending and patronising manner of her only son, how infinitely superior in wisdom and information he considered himself to his mother. He used to regard her blandly when she enforced economy, and assure her that she entirely misunderstood what was usual at the present day.

"Your guardian—what does *he* think?"

"Ah! my dearest mother, Lord Gower is an old fogey."

"I do not understand. What is to be understood by a fogey? Will you explain?"

"A fogey, my beloved mother, is a person who is dull in vision to the requirements of the present day. The word," said Sir Atheline, inventing as he went on, "is derived from fog, a per-

son always enveloped in a misty notion of affairs in general."

"Does Johnson so give it?" asked the lady.

"Johnson knew nothing of it, probably. The necessities of the present century have created hundreds of words unknown to that venerable writer."

"Then 'fogey' is slang?"

"Yes, perhaps it may be; but it is very expressive."

"Then, because Lord Gower thinks that it would be imprudent to encroach on your principal, and declines to do so, you think that he has but a misty notion of your future interest."

"Oh, my dear mother! it is useless to argue," said the son. "Women never can be made to understand." And Sir Atheline thought, "If they don't let me have the cash, I can go to a money-lender. I shall have more than I can spend when I am of age, and can repay it with interest, however high."

"Can you tell me why you want money particularly at present, my dear Atheline?"

"I want to make a present to a friend," said the boy.

"I am sure," said the innocent lady, "that no true friend would like to accept a present that embarrassed the donor's monetary arrangements; and, if he be a selfish fellow, why give him anything?"

Sir Atheline thought that Mademoiselle Ulalie, who longed for a pearl necklace, would understand little about his monetary arrangements. Sir Atheline's impatience was to prevent the young Duke of La Croix from forestalling him with this little token of devotion. The niggardly jeweller who was the possessor of this beautiful circlet refused credit, having recently been victimised by a young misnamed nobleman who had pleaded "infancy" as a set off against his obligations. So Sir Atheline, determined not to be balked, borrowed five hundred pounds, in addition to some other obligations of the same nature, and carried the pearls to his adored ballet girl, who accepted them with sweet condescension, and wore them that very evening at a supper she gave after the opera, at which the

Duke of La Croix assisted. Next day she took an early ride with his grace in the park, and, meeting Sir Atheline, failed to recognise him; doubtless from the fact that there was a soft mist in the air, and a Shetland veil over her beautiful eyes.

When Helena lost her dearest friend by the death of Lady Vernon, that lady's younger brother came to her seat in the country to exercise his duties and his rights as the nearest relative then in England left to perform the last sad offices.

He saw Helena, who was drooping like a rain-charged lily. She clung to him as a friend sent by Heaven in the place of the one of whom death had deprived her. A letter addressed to himself was found amongst Lady Vernon's papers, stating that she had left Helena but a small legacy, for hers was but a life income. She hoped, however, that her dear Atheline would choose for his wife one whose virtues equalled her personal attractions, and whose mental powers, naturally of a high order, had been sedulously cultivated in the acquisition of solid

intention. She confided, as it were tremulously, that her real desire for the union of her adopted daughter and her son was her conviction of the finer texture of Helena's character. The darling boy has at some periods of his life given her uneasiness as to his steadiness. Once wed to a clever and judicious wife, he would be moored to any amount of sail he might set. Lady Vernon explained to her brother that she had not allowed her wishes to be evident to the objects of them, believing that it would frustrate any intention.

Lord Gower found that a thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. was all Helena had to depend on. His heart bled for the portionless girl, who had lived in luxury all her life, and was utterly unfitted to contend with poverty. Uncles have not the same blindness to the failings of their nephews to which parents are subject. Lord Gower knew more of the career of Sir Athelinc than had ever reached the ears of his mother, and doubted whether Helena, a teacher in a fashionable school, would not be happier than Helena, the wife of a dissolute young man.

Lord Gower had attained to his wealth and his title at a late age, and had never married. At fifty he considered himself too old, though many fair creatures seemed desirous that he should reconsider this determination. However, he heeded not the voice of charmers, and resigned him to old fogeydom.

It became a question as to what was to become of Helena after the funeral. She could not remain in the mansion of Sir Atheline, as it were awaiting his return to be asked by him in marriage. She used to look into the face of Lord Gower in silent hopeless perplexity. Once she asked where a certain lady lived, who had been her godmother in conjunction with Lady Vernon. Lord Gower told her to look in the "Court Guide" for the desired information, and asked why she had inquired.

"I am so puzzled," she said, looking at his lordship, "to know what I can do—where I can go. I thought Mrs. Lyster might receive me for a few weeks, till some plans are settled for me."

"Probably she will do so willingly," replied her friend. "I wish you were married," said

the young lady, lifting her tremulous lids tear-laden to the face of her companion; "then I might have a home with you."

"So young and so attractive as you are, my dear, I have no doubt you will soon have one of your own," said Lord Gower, kindly. "In the meantime you had better communicate with Mrs. Lyster, and see if you can have a temporary residence with her."

"Oh, dear!" said Helena. "What can I say? I do not know her. I do not think she ever gave me a silver cup, or a knife and fork and spoon. How can I write to her — 'Dear madam, I have nowhere to go; will you take me in?'"

Lord Gower looked at the girl with a troubled expression. He could not say, "Your intended husband will be home in a few weeks, and reinstate you as mistress of the home you love so much." He did say, "My dear, if you find writing so awkward, I will do it for you."

"I will look out her address." Helena found it, and felt grateful for the kindness which strove to lighten part of her load.

Everything at No. —, Green Street was severe. Everything was propriety intensified. Every one did their duty, and never was duty so disagreeably done.

The family consisted of a widowed mother and two daughters, of the respective ages of thirty-nine and thirty-seven. Of these the elder showed symptoms of impatience that no one had hitherto asked her to change the long-worn name of Miss Lyster for a matronly title. The second was apt to consider herself quite young still, as her eldest sister was ye. unmarried. They were seated at the breakfast table with their mother, whose rigid face was surrounded with a severe-looking cap—a cap which permitted of no drooping of lace, or soft flow of satin ribbon. Every end of the bows was cut into an angular aggressive shape, of a material which seemed stiffened preternaturally by the manufacturer to suit the most unbending of her sex. The silver lines had streaked the banded hair of the elder of the young ladies. The younger wore ringlets, and occasionally relaxed into a giggle when she said

anything malicious, and her giggles were not unfrequent.

The letters, if any, were laid by the place of each member of the family. Miss Keturah, the younger of the daughters, cast her eye on the address of one to her mother, who was pouring out the tea at exactly three minutes after the water had been poured upon it, and could not relax her attention from the occupation.

"Gower! Mamma! there is a letter to you from Lord Gower."

"Is there?" said Mrs. Lyster, not showing any signs of impatience, though she was as much astonished as was Keturah.

"*Who* is Lord Gower?" asked Miss Lyster.

"He is a peer of about fifty years of age, possessing a fine unencumbered property."

"I wonder if he has seen either of us," said the elder young lady, "and wishes to know more of us." A pleased smile came over her face at the idea; but her mother opened the letter and read it in silence, and then exclaimed, "Very inconvenient."

"What is it all about, mamma?" cried both

daughters at the same moment; and as one seized the sheet the other looked over her shoulder and made herself acquainted with the contents at the same time as her sister.

The letter ran thus—

"Dear Madam,—Though I have not the pleasure of knowing you, I venture to ask you to do a kindness to a young lady, a ward of mine, and a godchild of yours. I assure you that nothing but the sympathy which I trust arises from our mutual duties would induce me to ask if you could give a home for a few weeks to Miss Pevensy, who is, by the death of Lady Vernon, left without a temporary residence. Trusting that I am not asking too great a sacrifice of your convenience, I remain, dear madam, faithfully yours, GOWER."

"No woman would have made such an outrageous request," said the mother.

"Does he mean to marry her himself after her *temporary* residence with us?" asked Miss Lyster.

"What nonsense! She is quite a child," answered her mother. "I do not think it is

more than ten or eleven years ago since your poor dear father, who was always doing unpleasant and compromising things, asked me to be godmother to Mrs. Pevensy's infant, to which he was godfather. I never gave the child anything, for I thought it was money thrown away. I never expected that the curse would come home to roost, in the shape of an unwelcome visitor."

"We *must* have her," suggested Abigail, the elder. "It would not be wise to offend Lord Gower." She arose and took the "Peerage" from the sideboard, and having satisfied herself of his lordship's age, thought a match between him and herself would be very suitable.

"I wonder why he does not send her to some good school," said Keturah.

"Probably he is looking out for one," replied the mother. "In the meantime the small bedroom in the attic will do for her very well. We do not often require that one. I do not like to disoblige Lord Gower."

The eyes of the elder daughter met those of her mother and read that the thoughts of each were identical.

"You had better write a civil letter in my name, Abigail; saying that we shall be ready to receive Miss Pevensy whenever it may suit Lord Gower to send her to us. You can say I have sprained my wrist; it *is* rather weak, you know. It is quite as well that the communication should come from you, my dear; it may lead to future correspondence."

The letter was written, expressing a hospitable wish to receive Miss Pevensy as soon as suited her convenience, and that of Lord Gower; and after a few more notes it was settled that Mrs. Lyster's carriage should meet the young lady at the station at three o'clock on the Thursday following the last communication.

"Ahem!" began Abigail, when Keturah was out of the room. "Do you not think, mamma, that it would be but kind that I should go in the carriage and receive Lord Gower's ward? I think it is an attention he will expect from some member of our family. He will certainly bring the child up himself."

"Very true, my dear; and put on your light blue silk, and the velvet hat with the

white feather ; that is your most becoming dress."

The lady went on her venture alone, notwithstanding her younger sister put in a claim for a sight of the peer, but Abigail answered that he was certain to come frequently to the house to see Miss Pevensy, so the pleasure would only be delayed, and not lost.

The lady was so eager that the carriage waited for ten minutes before the train came in; then there was a little delay, and, after a crowd of people had hurried out and made off, Miss Lyster perceived a tall, majestic man with grey hair, who seemed to be looking up and down in search of something. The footman, with the quick perception of a gentleman which long practice in London gives, stepped up and asked if his lordship was looking for Mrs. Lyster's carriage. Abigail Lyster was gazing out of the window in speechless amazement. That stupid footman must have been mistaken. But no, he came, opening the door and throwing down the step.

Lord Gower advanced. "I believe you are

the lady," he was about to say, "who is to take charge of my ward;" but politeness coming to his aid, he altered it to "My fair correspondent." Miss Lyster simpered. "Allow me to introduce my ward, Miss Pevensy."

And Abigail, more and more upset by seeing a lady's-maid looming in the distance, was compelled to hold out her hand with a show of cordiality, and make way for the blooming girl, whose beauty was more brilliant from contrast with the deep mourning of her crape dress.

Abigail did her best to blush, but only looked flushed and sour in the effort. She made way for Miss Pevensy on the seat by her side. Lord Gower placed the grim lady's-maid in a cab with Helena's luggage, and bowing profoundly to Miss Lyster, the carriage moved on.

The astonishment of Abigail was involuntarily expressed by the exclamation, "How very old you are!"

Helena smiled and said, "Do you think so? I am only eighteen."

"I mean," said Abigail, with an effort at politeness, "that, as my mother said it was not

more than ten or eleven years since she stood sponsor for you, we naturally expected a little girl."

"Mrs. Lyster was unable to attend my christening herself," said Helena. "I was privately baptized as an infant, and my parents waited for the full service till my dear Lady Vernon should return to England. I dare say Mrs. Lyster was never made aware of the age of the child for whose spiritual culture she made herself responsible."

"Lady Vernon seems to have been much attached to you. I believe you resided with her."

Tears gathered in Helena's eyes, and she bowed her head in silence. Helena was wondering if her age was a disappointment. Having the ignorant convictions of youth, she thought that Miss Lyster was quite old, and must long since have ceased to expect to be considered attractive; and she could not fancy, therefore, that she could be considered a rival in any way.

Two perplexities disturbed Abigail's mind. What had Lord Gower thought of her, and what would her mother think of Miss Pevensy being

full grown—taller, indeed, than either of the ladies who made up the Lyster family? What would she think of the necessity of giving this blooming beauty the best bedroom, and putting the undesired lady's-maid into the attic? These considerations made the elder daughter look sad, if not sour.

She turned to the pleasanter subject of thought, which regarded Lord Gower. "Your guardian is a very handsome man," she observed.

"Oh, yes!" replied his ward, cheerfully; glad to get a subject on which she could agree with her companion.

"So tall and gentlemanlike!" added Abigail.

"And so venerable!" suggested Helena.

"Well! I should never have thought of calling Lord Gower venerable," said Miss Lyster, much affronted.

"Why not? Should he not be so? His hair is very grey," responded Helena.

Miss Lyster always employed a woman who went out for hire, to clear her head of those blossoms of the grave once a month. It was a disagreeable subject, and she fancied that

Helena's eyes were seeking, under the shadow of Miss Lyster's bonnet, for those silver streaks which had accumulated since the last harvest.

"The hand of the reaper takes the hairs that are hoary," she thought; "but the harvest has probably been too long delayed. I must have her once a fortnight in future, or I shall have that girl considering me 'venerable.'"

"Has your maid been long with you?" asked Abigail, calling a fresh subject.

"She is not my maid properly," answered Helena. "She belonged to—to my dear friend. She has no occasion to remain in service, only she thought she would stay a few days till I was settled, lest I should feel lonely," and here the girl's voice quavered into a sob.

"I do not think you will feel lonely with us," said Abigail, with a quick eye to economy. "Our house is small. London houses are seldom abundantly provided with bedrooms; and our maid will be happy to do anything you may require."

To this suggestion Helena made no reply, but she felt every comfort slipping away, like

tide-washed sand from under the feet of the shipwrecked.

"All, all are gone, the old familiar faces," she thought; and the hard outline of her new acquaintance did not give much prospect of sympathy.

They reached Mrs. Lyster's residence at length, and Miss Lyster conducted Helena into the small library, which was next to the dining-room, lest she should hear the first burst of the maternal indignation at finding there were two occupants for beds instead of one; but her well-meant intentions were frustrated, for Mrs. Lyster came down to give some orders to the coachman, and saw the arrival of the lady's-maid and the luggage, and exclaimed, in a stentorian voice—

"Why, Abigail, this must be a mistake! Who is this woman, with all this luggage? Where is the child—is she not come? She can't want a nurse at twelve years old."

"Hush, mamma, hush! she will hear you." Helena had heard every word. "She is not a child; she is eighteen or twenty, taller than either

of us, and this is her lady's-maid. For Heaven's sake, compose yourself, or Lord Gower, a most interesting person, a nobleman, every inch of him, may be offended at any slight offered to his ward."

"Grown up! lady's-maid!" exclaimed the puzzled mistress.

"Yes," added her daughter. "Miss Pevensy's luggage must go into the best bed-room, and that of the maid into the attic."

Then said the mistress of the house, in an irritated tone, "I must give out another pair of sheets and pillow-cases to be aired."

This was also heard by Helena, and it is doubtful whether the conviction that, as the sheets were to be aired, she should not take cold, comforted her for the mortification of knowing she was unwelcome to her hostess.

She was glad of the retreat of the room she was to occupy. It smelt of smuts, that odour so peculiar to London, which is an abomination in the nostrils of country-bred folks. The curtains of dark chintz looked as if chosen

not to show the dirt. The dingy carpet did show it. Helena went to the window, and threw up the sash, and was greeted by a shower of blacks from the neighbouring chimneys. She closed it in disgust, finding that the toilet-cloth bore witness to her imprudence in a sprinkling of greasy spots. She thought with a sigh of her own room, over the windows of which the crimson Virginia branches hung like waving banners, and the pure breeze which swung them to and fro; and if she did not weep, it was because the fount of tears seemed exhausted. She had lost a tender friend, and with her all that had added beauty to life.

Helena rang for Wilmot, the lady's-maid, who came up with looks of discomposure on her face.

"It must be near dinner-time, ma'am," she said. "Shall I unpack your boxes? Oh, dear ma'am! you can never stay in this dreadful place. There is nothing but salt butter for tea, and that is allowanced."

She stopped, for the look of pain on Helena's face warned her to silence. But however great

the young lady's grief might be, those of a middle-aged lady whose comfort depended on her food were not lightly to be passed over. She kept the remembrance of her wrongs, however, to a future time, and prepared the dinner dress to adorn her beautiful young mistress.

The dinner would have been trying under the most favourable auspices, where there was one stranger only, with three of the same family, and those ladies ignorant of the feelings and tastes of their guest.

Whilst the servant was present, the occupation of eating, and the questions and answers of accepting or refusing the contents of different dishes passed away the weary time; but when the ladies were left to themselves there was nothing to be done but to try to get Helena to talk, or to talk amongst themselves, leaving her out, or to remain silent.

"Was Lady Vernon long ill?" asked Mrs. Lyster.

Helena's face began to quiver into a cry. She commanded her voice, however, and said—"She died suddenly."

The question brought back all the terrible scene. The telegram read, the faint cry and death-silence succeeding a heavy fall on the floor. Helena became so white as she uttered the words, that Mrs. Lyster entreated her to take some wine, thinking, "it will never do for the girl to become ill on my hands."

She was full of curiosity, however, to know what fortune her guest might possess. It would make all the difference between hashed mutton to-morrow, or a couple of chickens for dinner.

"Lady Vernon had a fine income, had she not?" was the leading question.

"Yes, I believe so," said Helena, with the indifference of a girl to ways and means, who had never wanted any essential, nor waited for any enjoyment, longer than loving heart could manage to procure it.

"I suppose the bulk of her property goes to her son?"

"Yes, the whole of it, I fancy, with the exception of a few small legacies."

"I really do believe," was Mrs. Lyster's

mental commentary, "that Lady Vernon left her nothing."

"I suppose," said Abigail, "that Lord Gower was often staying with his sister?"

"He never stayed very long. He was very fond of his own place, Loamlands. His sister spent much of her time there with him."

"And did you accompany Lady Vernon," asked Keturah.

"Yes, when I was not at school. We had a suite of rooms there, which were never occupied in our absence, so we felt as if it were another home."

"Is it a fine place?" inquired Miss Lyster, with an eye to future possession.

"Yes, very; it is a show house, which was a nuisance sometimes, for we had to retire from room to room every Thursday, when parties came."

"What was there to see?" said Abigail, still intent on future grandeur.

"Some very fine specimens of the old masters, and a gallery full of copies in marble of the best statues, both ancient and modern."

"Dear me!" said the lady, and she wondered if they were draped.

"Did Lord Gower collect them himself, or inherit them?" asked the eldest lady.

"He inherited the house and its contents, with the entailed estates and the title, on the death of his cousin."

CHAPTER III.

"In the performing of which they had greatly excelled,
But for want of taste, voices, and ears."

THE ladies now went to the drawing-room, where the opened piano and uncovered harp promised what is generally called by courtesy, music.

The sisters sat down and played several duets, at the conclusion of which Helena thanked them, and asked if they sang. It was like the letting out of waters—all people like to sing, and few to listen. Helena made a good auditor. She wanted to be quiet, and listened with as few wry faces as she could manage when the voices sinned against tune. In time they were very perfect, for that is mechanical. She knew she could sing well, and that her voice was powerful and well cultivated, but there was no one she

cared to please. To one song the ladies called Helena's attention particularly—it was "a sweet thing," and was manuscript—unpublished. A lady, their particular friend, gave it to them on condition that it should not be passed on. The sisters sang it, and Helena agreed that the air was beautiful

Mrs Lyster nodded in her chair, first with approbation, and then from sleep, and thus the evening passed on, till ten o'clock sounded a release to Helena, and she retired to her room.

"She was very much impressed by our musical talent," said Keturah to her sister, when they heard the door close on the departing steps of their visitor.

"Yes, I daresay she does not play or sing herself."

"Umph! I do not see that that follows. She might admire more from playing indifferently herself."

"Do you call her handsome, mamma?" said the elder daughter to Mrs. Lyster, who was just waking up.

"Not in the least," replied the mother. "Her hair is black, and her lashes and eyebrows also. Her cheeks are red, and that makes such a vulgar contrast—besides, she is too tall—a maypole. In my opinion, there is something refined and aristocratic in the absence of strong contrasts. When the hair and eyes and eyebrows are light, it gives a statuesque effect, especially if the features are classical;" and she said this softly, with a look of loving admiration at the hooked noses of her progeny.

"I wonder if Lord Gower will call to see her. I should think he *must*," said Miss Lyster.

"Yes, my dear, I think he is certain to do so, and it will be important that he should receive a favourable impression of our kindness to her; so be on your guard, girls."

"Certainly," replied both young ladies.

That evening Mrs. Wilmot, the lady's-maid, had sought Lord Gower, where he was staying, at Garlant's Hotel, and gave him an idea of what were likely to be the discomforts of Helena's present residence.

Mrs. Wilmot asked whether Miss Pevensy

might not take some respectable lodging, where she might feel more at liberty than at No. —?

Lord Gower knew better than Mrs. Wilmot the slender dimensions of Helena's purse, but he desired the lady's-maid to return to him at the same hour on the following evening, and he would tell her the result of his deliberations.

Mrs. Wilmot was somewhat comforted by this recommendation, and put up with a flock bed in the attic intended for Helena, with more patience than she would have felt had her meditations lacked the sweetening of hope.

On the following day the ladies asked Helena if she would like to go out with them and make some calls, after luncheon. She excused herself on the plea of the deep mourning she wore for Lady Vernon, and said, with truth, that her spirits were unequal to the strain necessary to take part in conversation.

They left her alone willingly, but a qualm seized Miss Lyster just as she seated herself in the carriage, lest Lord Gower should make his call in their absence. She was about to return to the house, but she dreaded her mother's

giving her sister a more expensive dress than her own, should she not be present to fight her own battles. So she left Helena undisturbed to her own reflections.

It would have been out of nature for Helena not to look forward with hope born of expectation to Sir Atheline's return. No one could sympathise so well with her sorrow as he, who had been similarly bereaved. She loved him, and having been kept in the dark as to his indiscretions, she dressed up an ideal Sir Atheline with attributes of her own investing. He was good looking and brave, and fancy added all the virtues to this outline. She had a photograph of him, with a frank, youthful face of great sweetness, and if the mouth and chin lacked firmness and decision, the absence of those qualities could not be discovered by a girl of eighteen.

She could not settle herself to any occupation in these tents of Kedar.

She stood at the window of the drawing-room, looking out listlessly into the street, without even an occupation of thought in expecting any one.

When the carriage containing the ladies returned, she stole up to her room and shut the door, to avoid seeing them.

"Your young lady seems very dull," suggested the lady's-maid to Mrs. Wilmot.

"And that is not to be wondered at," replied that functionary, snappishly. She added, "She has lost a kind friend, almost a mother, in my late mistress."

The bitterness of the undercurrent of Wilmot's thought was, "and she is reduced to live where the servants have salt butter for tea, and are allowanced even in that." What recollections lived in Wilmot's mind of the Marshmere dairies, and the daily pats of fresh-churned butter, where salt butter was not bought because fresh butter was so abundant.

Lord Gower had, however, good news to give Mrs. Wilmot. A friend of his, a widow lady, was going abroad with an invalid son, for some months, and she had gladly consented that Helena should occupy her house in Park Street, so long as she wished to do so, and found it convenient.

The dwelling was not large, but amply so for Helena, and for a respectable woman in reduced circumstances who was to keep house, and account to Lord Gower for the expenditure, for he knew that Helena had no idea of house-keeping, and had no funds to provide for its expenses, even if she had. "Poor dear girl!" he thought to himself. "I wish she were well married—but I distrust my hopeful nephew."

Mrs. Wilmot might remain with Helena if she chose it. It would be pleasanter for Helena to have some familiar face with her in her solitude. The park was close at hand for the young lady to take her morning exercise undisturbed. The small library would be at her disposal, and the piano.

Lord Gower communicated all this to Mrs. Wilmot, who heard it with much inward re-joicing, and Lord Gower promised to write to Miss Pevensy on the subject as well.

On the following morning the members of the family were all down before Helena, who saw one of the Miss Lysters hurriedly returning

a letter to that young lady's plate, after examining it.

"GARLANT'S HOTEL, *Tuesday Evening.*

"DEAR HELENA,

"Let me advise you not to disagree with, or show any coolness toward your hostesses, however uncongenial you may find them. The consolation that you may leave them in a few days will enable you to bear with a few inconveniences. I shall quit England to-night. I shall not try to see you again. I should do so only in the presence of strangers, which would destroy any satisfaction I might otherwise have felt in your society. I will write to you and keep you aware of my address. Do not scruple to apply to me in any difficulty, and remember that you have always a sincere friend in yours faithfully,

"GOWER."

The name in the corner of the address showed from whom the letter came, but Helena had no perturbation of spirit on receiving it, and placed it by her plate, while she addressed herself to the unappetising rack of thick dry

toast and a small piece of butter. She liked neither, and found a taste of terrible rankness in the latter, which made her sop the toast in her tea, in preference to eating it with such an accompaniment.

"Pray read your letter without ceremony, Miss Pevensy," said the eldest lady, who was curious to know something of the contents.

"I thank you, ma'am, I am in no hurry," replied Helena.

"What a proud, cold-hearted creature!" was the thought of each lady. "She must be very rich, or she would not give herself such airs."

Poor Helena did not know she was giving herself airs when she shrank from the uncongenial trio with whom she was associated. After the breakfast was concluded, she went to her room and read all Lord Gower's cordial letter.

"What a true friend!" she exclaimed, with enthusiasm, finding he had taken steps to release her from a situation so irksome. She summoned Wilmot, and desired her to make arrangements for an immediate transit, should it be necessary.

She remembered that Mrs. Lyster had kindly received her for an indefinite time, and she bore in mind Lord Gower's injunction not to allow any ill-feeling to escape her, so she determined to wait till some opportunity offered for her departure to Park Street.

When she returned to the drawing-room, it was with a cheerful look and an elastic step, and the three ladies there assembled speculated as to what could have been the contents of the letter she was so little anxious to read, but the effect of which seemed to have been so cheering. On entering the room she remembered that she had left in her bedroom the piece of embroidery with which she had provided herself for company work. Not feeling disposed to mount the stairs again, which, not being accustomed to a London house, she felt to be trying to her breathing powers, she went to the back drawing-room and opened the piano, asking permission of Mrs. Lyster to practise some music. The permission was politely given, and Mrs. Lyster begged that she would not close the intervening doors of the drawing-room that they

might have the pleasure of hearing her perform.

"But, I fear," added the lady, "you will find only vocal music—my daughters do not much care for overtures and sonatas."

"Thank you; I play a great deal from memory, and I shall not be at any loss."

The three ladies having, as they believed, put their visitor out of the way, began to discuss family matters.

As they paid their debts scrupulously they had no anxieties and few interests. The receipt from a large establishment of a cover of patterns of different materials and prices, amused them for hours, by the speculations they excited as to the most attractive combination of colours and the most durable texture. They wondered how much Mrs. Sutton had given for a certain silk, and whether it was of a finer quality than the fabric which tempted them, or they were certain that Louisa Crispen had a muslin of that pattern when they last saw her in the park. Then Tippet, the lady's-maid, was quoted on the subject of matching ribbon. Tippet was frequently

quoted, ladies being oftener governed by their attendants than they have themselves any suspicion.

Tippet had proposed remodelling the dresses of the three ladies on the pattern of Helena's recent mourning, which was made in the newest fashion. This took the thoughts of Miss Lyster back to the performance in the next room.

"Surely she cannot mean to marry him herself?" she murmured with a look of alarm.

"Don't be a fool, Abigail!" cried her sister. "Had it meant anything of the kind, do you think she would have remained so long eating her breakfast with the unopened letter at her side?"

"I don't know," said the mother, slowly, who loved her elder-born best, because Keturah snubbed them both. "If the matter were quite settled she would not be in haste: no woman so very young would show much eagerness to marry a man of fifty."

"Certainly Miss Pevensy is quite a child," said Abigail, "in age, though she is such a maypole in height. She has nothing whatever to say for herself, and is a very dull girl of slow

intellect, and seemingly without resources to amuse herself or anyone else. I dare say Lord Gower would prefer a woman of some intellectual power and knowledge of the world."

"Hark!" cried Keturah, "what is that she is playing? Why I really believe it is—yes—listen!—it is that beautiful air, 'The flame of a neglected fire wasting itself away.' What impertinence! where did she get it? She must have managed to find it in your music before we came down this morning," said Abigail.

"No, that could not be; it is locked up in the table-drawer."

All three ladies now dropt the patterns from their hands and listened after Helena had played the air through correctly. She began to improvise variations, at first plaintive and simple, but ending in a movement of astonishing brilliancy, which made the ladies look at each other with open lips and rounded eyes of wonder.

"Mrs. Wickerly must have given it to Lady Vernon, or to some mutual friend," said Miss Lyster, "and the girl's music-master probably composed the variations."

"Then giving it to us was not much of a compliment," observed Mrs. Lyster.

"No, unless it were obtained surreptitiously," observed the youngest lady. "Women are so double," she added, with indignation; "however, I'll soon know;" and smoothing her face into a look of smiling interrogation, she went into the second drawing-room, and said, "You were very sly not to tell us that you had that air arranged for the piano with variations. You must have a wonderful memory to play them all."

Helena smiled slightly.

"Indeed, I only remembered the air. You were so good as to play it three times for my gratification last evening, and so the marvel would be if I did not remember it."

"But the variations?" asked Keturah, thinking she was about to convict their guest of an untruth.

"Oh! they are easy enough when one gets into the habit of composing a little—they are the easiest things one can do."

Keturah returned crestfallen, feeling that the

estimate they had made of Miss Pevensy's accomplishments had been erroneous.

"But at all events she does not sing," they said; and this was a comfort, for no instrument equals in charm the human voice.

The listeners in the next room had heard all her discomfiture; but in the interest of measuring the width of the back seams, and the length of the waist, and the depth of the trimmings, they had no present sympathy to bestow. Abigail sat down rather depressed, and began to hope that Lord Gower did not care for music.

CHAPTER IV.

"Vanity fair! the children there
Are chained and stoned beside."

When the ladies repaired to the drawing-room after the dinner of mutton-broth, minced veal, and one fowl, as the amount of Miss Pevensy's fortune was yet undecided, Miss Keturah was determined to ask the crucial question whether their guest could sing. Mrs. Lyster had comforted her daughter by this argument—she cannot sing. Had she possessed this accomplishment she would not have perfected herself as an instrumental performer.

The ladies began to talk of a musical party they intended to give, and of the ladies they wished to engage for their performance. There was a Mrs. Fairlight, of whom they spake with bated breath—of course, if she would consent to

sing, she would have to be permitted to select her own music.

Miss Lyster pursed up her mouth when Keturah proposed to send her an invitation, and said, "Just as you and mamma please, Keturah," in a manner so suggestive of half-concealed bodily or mental turpitude on the part of the suggested visitor, that Helena was puzzled to know whether Mrs. Fairlight had recently recovered from scarlet fever, or whether she had a doubtful character, or "no character at all," which Pope declares to be the normal state of the gentler sex.

"Certainly, my dear!—ahem! It is right to be careful; but *not* too careful—and Mrs. Fairlight goes everywhere, and her receptions are delightful. I only wish she would send us cards more frequently."

"Very true, mamma; but where is Mr. Fairlight? Why does he never appear?"

"Abroad, my dear! Abroad, making all that money which surrounds his beautiful wife—I declare, at the opera the other night, her diamonds beat those in the Royal box!"

"It is said," observed Miss Lyster, "that beautiful as she is, she cannot command her husband's constancy—and that if Mrs. Fairlight's diamonds are matchless, so are the emeralds of a celebrated beauty in Paris."

"My dear," said the mother, raising her hand and sweeping it along the air, "we have nothing to do with *that*. So long as Mrs. Fairlight is surrounded by such proofs of her husband's regard it is plain they are on good terms. Moreover, according to your account, the wife has the diamonds, and they are of more value than emeralds. She had nothing but her beauty when he married her. Men do get tired, my dear children, and want a variety sometimes; but I have observed that if a wife blinks her eyes very hard, the man will come back to her in the long run."

"Yes," observed Keturah, "when all the blandishments of life are gone, the coward husband sneaks back to his wife to be nursed, and give to her and to Heaven what the world will no longer tolerate, his battered body and enfeebled mind."

"You are so virtuously severe, my dear Keturah—'but to return to our mutton,' as the French say——"

"Whom you do not consider a lost sheep," said her flippant daughter.

"Permit me to conclude," said Mrs. Lyster, with dignity; "no one can accuse Mrs. Fairlight of favours to any gentleman especially."

"No," said Keturah, with a spiteful laugh, "for, like the sun, she shines on all alike."

"My dears," said Mrs. Lyster, "say nothing—imply nothing against the bridge that carries you over—men are like flies, they go where there is most warmth and brilliancy: you won't find young men, no, nor old ones either, in your starched propriety circles, though they are the best. What you want is men!"

"Mamma!" cried both ladies in a breath; "how coarse!"

"What then," said the elder lady, "you cannot marry ladies. It is useless to disguise the fact, that's all. Young ladies look forward to improving their social state by marriage. The only way to accomplish this is by going into

society, and the society which offers the greatest assemblage of young men is the most likely to suit you both. Not that I would have you receive one whom society does not recognise as immaculate."

"Just so! Let us make hay while the sun shines—gather ye rosebuds whilst ye may," said Keturah; "there is no saying how long the rosebuds will keep on their proper stems."

Helena, awakened from a reverie which had taken her a walk with her beloved Lady Vernon, plunged into this wandering in the past by the flower painted in the plate which lay before her on the breakfast-table. She heard a remote talking about some Mrs. Fairlight, of which she understood nothing except that she seemed to be a desirable acquaintance to cultivate.

"Is Mrs. Fairlight beautiful?" she asked indifferently.

On this all the ladies began to talk at once; and in the benevolent dread lest Helena might possibly consider herself handsome, they strove each to outdo the other in commendation of the absent lady.

But Helena could not be made jealous on an abstract subject; she had not the pain of loving and seeing a more beautiful object preferred, or one less beautiful, in a style differing from her own; and seeing, from the placidity of her countenance, they had not succeeded in mortifying her, they put her down as utterly destitute of perception.

Helena, feeling herself every hour more solitary in the home circle, was casting about for some opportunity of leaving it which might not give offence.

There was this musical party to be given, and Mrs. Lyster did not see why Helena should not earn her board by playing a grand sonata while the guests were coming in and seating themselves. "It does not matter in the least what it is, provided it makes noise enough," as she confided in conclave to her daughters; "and Miss Pevensy seems to play with great execution."

"That is true," agreed Miss Lyster.

"And after that we will have that charming old duet, 'See from Ocean Rising,' and then

Signor Amoretti shall sing his own composition, and then——"

"But had we better not ask Miss Pevensy if she will play?" suggested Abigail.

"People, my dear, who offer themselves as guests must do as they are requested."

So when Helena entered the room, armed with her work-basket and the loathed piece of tapestry which was the provision for wearisome hours, Mrs. Lyster suggested to her, sweetly, that she wished her to exert her wonderful skill on the evening of her musical party in playing some concerto or overture; and to show how highly she estimated Miss Pevensy's talent, she would prefer her leading off the performance, "to create a good impression," as she obligingly added.

Helena flushed a little, and said she was sorry she could not make herself useful in that way—the recent loss of her kind patroness made an appearance in public very distasteful to her.

"As to that, my dear Miss Pevensy," said Mrs. Lyster, "no one will know how short a time Lady Vernon has been dead, and—and—

my maxim has always been to be sweet-tempered and obliging to any friend who required my service."

Helena felt, by implication, that she was considered neither.

"In fact, my dear, your being here, so slightly connected as we are, is a proof how conscientiously I have acted up to this principle. Indeed, I have a niece," Mrs. Lyster continued, "who plays and sings most divinely, and who would come up from the country to accommodate me for this party, only at present I have not the means of making her comfortable."

Mrs. Lyster had no such niece at her disposal, but she thought that by this statement Helena, having no home, would be compelled to agree to her proposition; but the young lady, who had only been waiting for the opportunity thus offered, looked sweetly at her hostess, and begged she would engage her niece at once, for that she had not intended to trespass on the hospitality so kindly accorded to her beyond the end of the week, as she was about to remove to No. —, Park Street."

This piece of news so affected Mrs. Lyster that she became breathless, and was only able to articulate something about regret—thinking of Lord Gower, and wishing that she had been less imperative with her guest.

Then she left her to talk the matter over with her two daughters, of whom Abigail was severe, feeling her chance of Lord Gower had been diminished; and Keturah indifferent, as he was too old for her to think of as a husband yet; whilst Helena felt as a prisoner for whom the day of release is fixed.

It came at length. The ladies were prodigal of their expressions of regret; and lest Helena should be too happy in escaping from them, they assured her that they should do themselves the pleasure of calling in Park Street. They understood the house was "quite a little snuggery."

Helena was not sorry that her lady companion had not yet arrived. It was pleasanter to turn herself round in her new abode without feeling herself compelled to make obliging speeches to an elderly stranger, however useful and necessary she might be when Helena received company.

She found a small library unlocked, and some valuable books of engravings. In the back drawing-room there was a charming conservatory, full of flowers, which perfumed the room as Helena opened the glass-door. Her maid came to take her orders for dinner, and Helena, feeling herself free from the oppression of her former surroundings, sat down on the sofa to read one of the volumes which the owner of the house had liberally left at her disposal.

CHAPTER V.

"Where musing Memory loves to dwell
With thee, her sister, Solitude."

How delightful it is to be alone, she was never weary of thinking for the first three days. Then she began to wonder if the musical party was progressing favourably, and to remember, with somewhat of a chuckle—if anyone so self-contained and dignified as Helena ever could have condescended to the ghost of a chuckle—that she had left the place of the grand overture vacant for Mrs. Lyster's niece, or any one who could be found sufficiently obliging to take it.

Then came a feeling, rather than a conviction, that she was glad she had not broken with the Lysters entirely. They were by no means companions she would have chosen. They were, she thought, spiteful, empty-headed, and contemptible as compared to the friend she had lost;

but they were human beings, living in the same status of society as herself, and she began to wonder when they would call, instead of nursing her determination to be walking out when they should arrive—so true is it that women cannot do without companionship of their own sex. The Lysters were as distasteful to Helena as the thistle could have been to Sterne's ass; but, like that hungry animal, she had no choice but taking or leaving the only thing within her reach.

At length the two young ladies called, when Helena had been wearying for them for a week, with an apology from their mamma for her non-appearance. "She was so tired, poor mamma! so very much fagged with the musical party last night."

"I should have thought it would have been delightful," said the ignorant Helena, "especially as Mrs. Lyster seems to take so much interest in music."

"O, yes, that of course; but you know there was a deal of trouble—all the carpets to be taken up in the drawing-room, and the furniture pushed here and there and everywhere, and the

tradesmen and workmen are so expensive and so very provoking. You remember dear papa's portrait which Mr. Simuel, the artist, insisted should have a swivel stand to itself? We girls always thought it would be very much in the way, and it always has been," said Abigail, "and not a pretty piece of furniture to contemplate anyway. Of course, I mean when it is shut up," she added, hearing Keturah's provoking sniggle; "and will you believe it, one of the workmen drove his elbow through the glass, and the blow has damaged my father's nose right across. It is dreadful! Mamma will have to pay something handsome to Mr. Simuel to repair it, and I am sure she can't afford it. You see she will have to ask it as a favour, and then give twice the value as a present—one always has to do that kind of thing."

"I am very sorry," said Helena, with real concern, for she thought the struggle in Mrs. Lyster's mind between the desire to have her husband's nose repaired and her inability to pay for it must be great.

"It is all mamma's nonsense in putting papa

into a swivel case," said Keturah—"always in everyone's way. Now had papa been put up in his place against the wall, as he ought to have been, it would not have happened."

"Tell me," said Helena, "how did your duet go off?"

"Oh, it was unanimously applauded!" cried both ladies at once. But Keturah wished to have been alone to have confided to Helena that Abigail's voice was very husky last night, and Abigail felt the same desire to inform her that Keturah had held F natural for a second, when it should have been F sharp, and had not found it out.

"Was Mrs. Fairlight there?" Helena asked, with languid curiosity.

"Oh, yes, she came, looking lovelier than ever. I am sure it is well that she is a married woman, for she would spoil everyone's chance. But, dear me, what a charming house you have—not large, but so airy, pretty, and well furnished—and what lovely flowers! Well, you will have to pay a large sum for fresh ones if the greenhouse is to be kept up."

"Shall I?" asked Helena, with a misty feeling of scare.

"Yes, my dear. I don't know what your income is," said Miss Lyster, "but you don't have a succession of greenhouse plants for nothing."

"I must inquire. I never thought of that," said the girl, helplessly. "I found them here."

"Oh, yes, of course, and the man will come at his regular time and take them away. You had better say that you will pay ready money in future for them—that will save you in some degree from imposition."

Helena determined to consult her maid on this knotty point, but she had a suspicion that Mrs. Wilmot would know as little about the matter as she did herself.

There was a pause, for the young ladies were peering round the room, surmising the value of every article.

"I did not know Lady Chilcot was a friend of yours," observed Abigail.

"Nor is she. She is a friend of my guardian, Lord Gower."

"Oh!" gasped the lady, dropping the end of

the embroidered table-cover with some degree of awe.

"Do you know," said Keturah, "why we are staying so long with you? It is not that you are unusually lively and charming this morning, but that the workmen are putting down carpets and replacing furniture; so there is only the choice between our own bedrooms for prisons and our friend's drawing-room for prisoners at large."

"But you have so grand a circle of friends," suggested Helena, smiling, "that I cannot but feel flattered that you should give me an unfair division of your company."

"Umph!" said Keturah; and she thought, "Miss can be sharp enough when she likes; she has learnt something from me."

"Oh!" she said aloud, "I remember now I had something to tell you, or rather to ask you. Had your friend, Lady Vernon, a son or a nephew, Sir Atheline Vernon?"

"Yes," replied Helena, changing colour, "a son."

"I saw his name as having reached England 'on urgent private affairs.'"

"Yes, he was wounded in the Balaclava charge," said Helena.

"Well, my dear, they say that he is very wild. Not that I know anything of him. So good-bye, and don't forget to inquire about those greenhouse plants."

And they were gone, having left a sting behind them.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ever believe that story false
Which ought not to be true."

VERY wild! That can be only their ill-natured remark. Keturah is a spiteful woman. He, his mother's son, can never have wandered even to the outer edge of the circle of vice. She went to her workbox and took from it a photograph of Sir Atheline Vernon, which his mother had always kept by her bedside. How open! how defiantly candid was the expression of his face! There seemed no back-thought to be concealed. It was a face that commanded, rather than pleaded for, a favourable judgment. Helena involuntarily raised the photograph to her lips, and then put it down hastily.

"No one will ever know," she said.

Then she speculated as to what he was about. In London, perhaps, at that very moment.

Would he seek for her? Surely he will for the sake of his dead mother. She had not communicated her address to the housekeeper at her former home, now that of Sir Atheline. She had not thought of doing so, and even had she considered the question she had no excuse for the act.

It would be idle to suppose that Helena had not thought of her benefactor's son, as the possible companion of her life. He had come down to take a last leave of his mother before he sailed for the Mediterranean, but Helena had not intruded on the interview from delicacy; as he was hurrying out to step into his carriage one of the gardeners opened the door of the conservatory, and he had seen a beautiful girl standing on one of the stages to reach some passion-flowers which hung in natural festoons from the rafters. She turned her head at the noise in opening the door, and the two young faces recognised the perfection of each other. Atheline was hurrying to active service which might mean death, and Helena gazed with anxious tenderness on the youth whose term of life might

be so brief. Atheline on his part felt torn too suddenly from the loveliest creature his eyes had ever worshipped. She was dressed in a muslin of light blue, flowered on a white ground; her arm was raised, and the sun, striking through her fingers, gave them the tint of roses with which the ancients invested Aurora. She was a vision of purity and grace, with features between the regularity of a Grecian face and the soft undefined outline of girlhood.

"As I passed I worshipped," Sir Atheline might have said. After that glimpse his recollection of home became more tender, more profound. His mother's image was mingled with that of Helena, and in his day-dreams and night visions he loved them both When he heard of his mother's death, after the first shock, his thoughts strayed to Helena. He would return and hear from those charming lips all the circumstances of his crushing loss; he fancied that he should find Helena at his mother's mansion—he had not yet begun to think of it as his own; but when he reached Marshmere he found the rank weeds had sprung up over the pathway,

and the closed shutters told unmistakably the absence of human life. The pealing of the bell sounded hollow through the hall and empty passages. Surely, thought Sir Atheline, they cannot have dismissed the gamekeeper; and he made his way through tangled rosebriars to the chase which led to Dermot's cottage.

The man was just returned from trying some half-broken dogs, and lifted his cap as if to a stranger, so altered was Sir Atheline in the transition from youth to manhood.

"Don't you know me, Dermot?" he said, with a sad smile.

"No, Master Atheline, I did not. Not much amiss with your arm, I trust, sir?"

"No, not much; the bone was damaged, which makes it slow to heal. I am afraid I shall make sorry work with the birds next September, if my arm does not get stronger. I have been up at the house, but it is all shut up."

"Yes, sir, I have the key; my missus goes up every day to see that things are all right. Are you thinking of coming down to live in the old place, sir?"

"I don't think so. You see I am a soldier, Dermot, and must go where I am sent."

"We heard a deal about you. My lady was wonderful proud of you, and so indeed we all are."

"Not much to be proud of, Dermot. There were hundreds who did as well; but I should like to see someone who was with my mother at the last."

"Miss Pevensy was always with her, your honour."

"And where's Miss Pevensy?"

"Oh! that we don't know down here, sir. Lord Gower took her away up to London somewhere. 'Twere best to find *him*."

After a little more conversation Sir Atheline returned to the railway station to take a ticket for London.

He had fancied he should see the beautiful vision of the greenhouse wandering sadly in the deserted mansion, which would still be ready to receive him; that he should hear from her all the details of his mother's last illness, and the record of her intense love for himself. Somehow

he felt injured that it was not as he had fancied it would be. The idea of the impropriety of a young girl keeping house alone, till he should return, to occupy it with her, had never struck him.

That Lord Gower, his uncle, had taken her away,—meant to marry her he should not wonder. His uncle had never liked *him*, he felt sure. Folks always discover instinctively that they are disliked. Lord Gower had seen that Sir Atheline was indulged as only children of fond mothers generally are. Every indication of dawning intelligence was welcomed as a wonder. Lady Vernon, sensible in every other circumstance of life, was idiotic about her son. When he grew up and gave her grave cause for disapprobation, she found germs of virtue in the rank growths of vice. If she showed anger, she punished herself far more than her son, and forgave him so soon that he forgot she had evinced any disapprobation, rushing again on his reckless career, as if she had rather patted him on the back than not.

When women love thus, they are always un-

just to others, for the sake of the object of their worship. Had Sir Atheline's expenses been less, Lady Vernon would have been able to retain the modest portion of £5000 which she had saved for Helena from her own expenses; but when from his extravagances it became a question whether to keep the estate which she had laboured so sedulously to clear, or sacrifice her hardly obtained savings, she did the latter, hoping that Sir Atheline would marry Helena, then she would have abundant wealth.

These extravagances she called exaggerated generosity. He would see the injustice of such lavishness of money when he grew older. Helena would lead him into safe paths. She had done all that she could to impress Sir Atheline with the attractions of her adopted daughter, by rarely allowing them to meet in childhood. Let the maiden have the charm of novelty as well as of grace and beauty, she argued. Children who are thrown together in infancy must lose all the romance which may otherwise deify a first love. Who can prevent a lover, blest or cursed, as the case may be, with a retentive memory, from pic-

turing his companion of the present hour as he had seen her in days gone by, with her cheeks shining with bread and butter, or strumming dreary monotones on the schoolroom's wheezing piano, or sprawling on the gravel with excoriated hands and kicking legs, in the first unsuccessful effort to handle a skipping-rope; or clutching the biggest apple herself, and sheepishly offering him the smallest, in the faint hope that he will not perceive the difference? No, let there be no back thoughts to spoil the golden present, and represent the imperfections of the human animal, which, though concealed, may not be obliterated.

So Sir Atheline went to London to see his lawyer, and find out how much cash he might obtain and dispose of at once, to meet some debts of honour contracted in the homeward-bound vessel. Shipboard was dismally dull, he thought. He had not even the variety of being sea-sick. So he played *écarté*, and betted on his play, and lost to a cleverer man than himself, though the young baronet was by no means deficient. The money so pinchingly hoarded for

him by Lady Vernon was not to come into his possession, except to be parted with to another possessor.

This is as it ever will be, whilst mothers are fond and foolish, and boys conceited and reckless. When the greatest portion of his ready cash had been thus disposed of, he would have to wait for the coming in of the rents before he obtained more. Then he thought of Helena.

"Can I see my mother's will?" he asked, for a little feeling of consciousness prevented his making any direct inquiries about Miss Pevensy.

The will was produced, and he read it hurriedly till he came to the portion which referred to Helena.

"One thousand pounds in the three per cents!" he exclaimed, looking at Mr. Pincent, the lawyer. "Miss Pevensy has no doubt a fortune of her own," Sir Atheline added, in a consolatory tone to himself.

"On the contrary," said Mr. Pincent, coldly, "that's her paternal fortune. She has not a sixpence, save this paltry thousand pounds, poor young lady! She would have possessed five

thousand more, saved by Lady Vernon from her dowry, but you required the money to free you from debt, and Lady Vernon sacrificed Miss Pevensy's interests rather than create another mortgage on the estate."

"Where is Miss Pevensy now?" asked the impetuous youth.

"Somewhere under the care of Lord Gower in Park Street, I fancy," said Mr. Pincent.

"And where is he?" reiterated Sir Atheline.

"I really don't know; travelling abroad, I fancy."

With this statement the young man was satisfied in some degree. If Helena was in Park Street she was within his reach; if Lord Gower was abroad, she was beyond his. So he had time to turn his attention to a sweetly pretty little girl in a coffee-house—far too young and innocent-looking to be placed in a situation so dangerous, and in cultivating her acquaintance he was diverted for some little time from the efforts to find out Helena's locality.

Whilst Sir Atheline was thus enjoying life, and forgetting his mother as if she had never existed,

Helena mourned for her with a persistent sorrow. Much may be excused to the young man. He felt emancipated from feminine control; his mother's letters, loving as they always were, generally concluded with words of warning or advice which were distasteful to the person to whom they were addressed.

"All gammon, dear lady mother! You knew nothing of life. We don't do things now as they did a quarter of a century since when my father married. Have I not been a man amongst men? Have I not ridden in the Balaclava charge, and been severely wounded? Am I a man to be kept in leading-strings at this time of the day?" Save these letters there was nothing in his daily life to bring Lady Vernon to his mind.

With Helena, whose every day and every hour had been partaken with his mother, the lost companionship of one whom she considered in every particular her superior. In this she was partly right and partly wrong. Had she been Sir Atheline's mother she would have driven with a tighter rein and sharper curb,

and would have probably succeeded better, but Helena had not her friend's quality of mercy. She had not the tenderness to forgive. There was a line of right, and one of wrong doing. She could not pardon any one who chose the latter.

But at present she believed Sir Atheline to possess all the virtues of her deceased friend, strengthened by manhood. He had not yet found out her locality, but he would do so, and she rose every morning with her face softened into pleasing hope, and sighed, as she dropped asleep, that her expectations had not been fulfilled.

CHAPTER VII.

"He comes, he comes, in all the charm of youth,
Unswerving love, and unabated truth."

In the meantime the image of the beautiful spirit in the green-house had faded before the substantial loveliness which met him at every turn in the thronged park, at the magic hour of driving or riding therein. That Helena had only 30*l.* a-year because his debts had absorbed all his mother had saved for the orphan child, had ceased to trouble him; for Sir Atheline's mind was a sheet of water, which ceased to reflect what was removed from its neighbourhood.

One afternoon he had been driving in the park with a friend, who turned his cab down Park Street.

"Do you know why I choose this dull street?" he asked.

"No—why? Park Street, is it not? What do I know about Park Street, I wonder?" said Sir Atheline. "Something I had to think of is connected with it."

"In the meantime you shall have the benefit of *my* recollections. I saw here, a few evenings since, walking with an elderly woman, and, like her companion, dressed in the deepest mourning, the most beautiful and graceful girl I ever saw. She went into one of the houses here, and I have turned down to see if one might have a second look."

Sir Atheline was silent, after a "By Jove!" when he seemed as if he had checked himself suddenly.

"Into which house did she go?" he asked, in a tone of simulated indifference.

"I did not observe the number," replied his companion; "and had I done so, it would be impossible to make any advances without a regular introduction. There could be no doubt whatever as to her being thoroughbred, and perfectly respectable. Should like another glimpse of her. No luck!" continued Captain

Thornycroft. "Never mind, try again to-morrow."

Sir Atheline got out of the cab as soon as he could, without attracting suspicion, saying that he wanted to fit some gloves at a glove-shop. Then he went to the local post-office and asked if Miss Pevensy resided in the street, and at what number.

The post-mistress stared intrusively at the handsome inquirer, and, taking a handful of letters from the box, she read them over to herself. "Miss Pevensy did you say? No, sir, there is no such name here;" but there was a letter, with a foreign post-mark, on thin paper, addressed to Mrs. Wilmot, at No. —, Park Street, of which he managed to read the reversed address, and Sir Atheline's quick intelligence alone understood that the name was that of his mother's confidential attendant, and that Lord Gower, with whose handwriting he was familiar, was the writer. He had received sundry terse letters of good advice from his uncle, and he felt rather a loathing of the clear caligraphy. No doubt the letter contained an

enclosure for Helena, or had reference to her in some way. The last suspicion was certainly a just one, for Lord Gower had written to Mrs. Wilmot, to inquire concerning Helena's health and comfort, and as to whether they had as yet seen anything of Sir Atheline. The letter had been forwarded from Mrs. Lyster's residence, which accounted for its being in the local post-office.

Sir Atheline was not one who brooked delay when he was bent on following out his fancy. He walked at once to the number indicated on Lord Gower's letter; and when hope was dull, and expectation half dead, Helena heard the name, entwined in her memory, announced by the servant, and her friend's son was by her side.

CHAPTER VIII.

"If lusty Love should go in search of Beauty,
Where would he find a fairer than in Blanche?"

Sir Atheline had advanced hesitatingly, and taken the hand which hung listlessly at Helena's side, before he uttered the word, "Helena!" with tremulous lips.

She looked at him, struggling to find her voice, and overcome by the thousand nameless likenesses between him and his dead mother—by the little nervous quiver of the eyelids—by the effort to steady his voice, which she had observed in Lady Vernon.

"Sir Atheline!" she said, not withdrawing her hand from his.

"Will you let me call you Helena?" he cried; "you have always been Helena to me in my mother's letters. It is strange that I have only once before had the pleasure of seeing

you, since you were twelve years old, and yet you have made a part of my mother's life, and, consequently, of mine. And this," said he, leading her to the sofa, "is the first time I have had the happiness of addressing you since our interview, years ago, in the garden. How much you must have to tell me of my darling mother!"

Helena turned away her head and wept.

"Ah!" he cried, "I have been unfeeling in recalling so abruptly your recent suffering. Let us leave a subject which must distress you. Are you comfortable here, dear?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he said, "I have been searching for you so anxiously. Can you guess how I found you out? I went to the post-office, and saw a letter addressed to Wilmot, and I knew that from her I should probably learn something of your residence, even should you not be together."

While he spoke Helena made an effort to recover her composure, and turned to look at Sir Atheline with admiring eyes. She smiled, and looked more beautiful in smiling.

"You resemble your portrait," she said; "but you are broader, and older, and darker."

"More like a man and less like a mother's darling—is it not so?"

"I don't know; she would have loved you equally had your face been deformed by scars. You wear your arm still in a sling; does it hurt you?"

"Sometimes; but nothing to speak of; but it is a nuisance to talk of oneself. I went down to see the old place."

"Did you?" asked Helena, eagerly.

"Yes. It looked dreary beyond expression. The long grass and dock leaves had overgrown the pathway, all the window-shutters were closed, and the ring of the bell produced eerie echoes in the empty chambers."

"Was there no one to keep it aired?"

"Dermot's wife has the key," he said. "She airs it daily. The gardens appeared to me to be going to ruin. Economy seems to be Lord Gower's idea. I think it is a mistake in this instance."

"It appears to me to be desecration," said

Helena — "where everything used to be so carefully kept. What shall you do with it?"

"I have not yet decided," said the young man. "I have been so necessarily occupied since I came from the East that I have had no time for consideration. Perhaps you will not mind talking it over with me some day."

"Indeed, I shall be very glad to do so," said the girl, for her thoughts travelled back to the pensioners on Lady Vernon's bounty, who must have suffered unusual privations from her death. She believed that Sir Atheline's income was very large, and she trusted that he would assent, with pleasure, to any proposition she should make as to continuing the weekly sums which had given some alleviation to the progress of disease, and would soften the sufferings of the last hours of life.

The chimes on the chimney-piece struck the hour, and Sir Atheline rose.

"May I come and see you to-morrow?" he said, timidly, as she rose too.

"Yes, certainly," she replied. "I am very

lonely here, and I have no friends, only some acquaintances—one family of three ladies comprises all these. So," she added, smiling, "it is no compliment to say that you will be welcome. Oh, so welcome! for every look—every sound of your voice, reminds me, by sudden transitions and unexpected tones, of her who has left me."

"Dearest Helena, I give you the caress with which I should have parted from her," he said, and, stooping down, he pressed his lips to her brow. The kiss was given as gravely as if it had been bestowed on the forehead of his dead mother, and Helena, though she flushed slightly, felt that it was the kiss of a relative, and not of a lover; yet she was flattered and happy. She had someone who belonged to her now. She had something to look forward to for the following day; and when she awoke to half-consciousness in the night, she was happy, without knowing why.

She could make no especial change in her dress—mourning did not admit of it; but the fresh beauty of eighteen required no adorning,

and her brilliant skin looked clearer and brighter for the opposition of the lustreless crape of her well-fitting jacket.

Helena had received a letter that morning from the lady who was to act as her *chaperone*, hoping that a little delay would not inconvenience Helena, as she was a prisoner at Brighton, whither she had gone for change of air, from rheumatic fever. Helena cared not how long she stayed; she was too innocent to know that the usages of society made it unusual that two young people of different sexes should spend an unlimited time alone. She felt that a stranger, who had never known her, nor her deceased friend, would be to her only what Lord Thomas's sister prophesied he would find his wife when she grew elderly, to be but

"A fat fadge by the fire,"

a creature to debar others from the degree of warmth to which they were justly entitled.

CHAPTER IX.

"O for old Saturn's days of sugar-candy;
Meanwhile I drink to your return in brandy."

When Sir Atheline left Helena, on the previous day, he went to his club, and saw his friend, who had been the unconscious cause of his meeting Helena. He was aware of a feeling of triumph, when he looked at him, thinking how much his friend had desired an introduction to the beautiful young woman, who was his own particular property—a legacy left him by his mother. But for the admiration expressed by his friend for the unknown lady, Sir Atheline might have put off his search for Helena, *sine die*.

Ere he left his club he called for some brandy and soda-water, for Sir Atheline suffered from thirst in a remarkable degree, considering the quantity of fluid he swallowed.

The day closed with an uproarious dinner and high play. On the following morning he awoke with his tongue seemingly glued to the side of his mouth on which he had been lying, and this necessitated a violent pull at the bell, which the valet answered; and, to avoid having another journey, he appeared, armed with a tray, holding a bottle of soda-water, with one of brandy, and a corkscrew. Sir Atheline raised himself on his elbow to imbibe the longed-for beverage, and then turned to sleep again.

When he presented himself to Helena his eyelids were so inflamed, that she reproached herself for the passing thought, of which she had been half-conscious, that Sir Atheline's grief for his mother's death had been less bitter than her own. "Poor darling!" she said to herself, "what tears he must have shed, to make his eyes in such a state!" and there was a tone of added tenderness to the intense sympathy of her greeting.

When the companions of Ulysses had been turned into swine, they are said to have been conscious of their degradation.

Some youths of the present day, however, are more blest, for they are by no means ashamed of "hot coppers" in the morning, nor of the sodden faces and blear eyes with which they greet their female relations.

The smell of tobacco-smoke was an abomination to Helena, and made her draw back, after she had placed her slender hand in that of Sir Atheline. He recognised the cause, and determined that, in future, he would not smoke till after his visit to his mother's friend. "My poor dear mother," he thought, "had the same old-fashioned prejudice, and has brought up that charming girl in her own way. I daresay she will get over it."

"Only thirty pounds a-year to live on! Poor girl! I *must* marry her. No great sacrifice, to marry a beautiful and strictly brought-up girl of eighteen, and I have enough and to spare for us both—that is to say," he continued, with a really saving clause, "when I have gotten over these cursed I O U's."

So they drew up towards the fire, which Helena liked, "because it seemed," she said,

"like company," though the weather did not render it necessary.

"How have you been amusing yourself, Helena?" Sir Atheline inquired, looking doubtfully at two newly-covered books on the table. "Ah! there are an Italian grammar and dictionary."

"I bought them, or, rather, I sent Wilmot to buy them, that I might try to learn a little Italian."

"But what detestable type!" said the youth, taking up the dictionary. "There is so fine a copy at home, so good in type, and so exhaustive in explanation. Why did you not take that?"

"That is yours, you know. I had no right after—Lady—after it had become your property, to take it down from the library."

"Ah! Well, you were very punctilious. Have you made any progress in your studies?"

"No, nothing to be proud of; but it passes the time away, to guess at the English, from the little I know of Latin, and then the French helps me."

Always versatile, Sir Atheline took up an

Italian book of selections from various authors, and amused himself with guesses at the English, Helena giving her aid now and then. She observed that, having mastered one story, he hunted through the book for some more by the same writer.

"Why do you do that? Do you admire the style particularly?" asked Helena.

"By no means," replied Sir Atheline; "but, after shambling through these words, we shall be sure to find similar ones in the same writer; that is the way with authors. I found, to my cost, that when, as a boy, I could read Virgil, the meaning of Ovid was a sealed book to me till I got into his run of words also. It might be a comfort to a learner to think how very few will carry him through a language."

"I suppose you mean original words, *in puris naturalibus*, not dressed up with adverbs, or dragged through declensions of nouns and tenses of verbs? Instead of thinking a language easy to acquire, I shrink from all the difficulties of learning one without a master, or someone who would help a very lame dog over verbal stiles."

"What led you to think of it?" asked Sir Atheline.

"Lady Vernon was unwilling I should learn Italian without the aid of a good master, from whom I might acquire the pronunciation correctly; but had she known how very sad and dull I am, she would have been very glad that I should do anything to amuse myself. Perhaps, when I get my companion, it will not be so bad."

"Your companion? — of whom do you speak?"

"Mrs. Rosemary, a lady whom Lord Gower engaged to remain with me for some little time. She is too ill to leave Brighton at present; but I hope she will soon come."

Sir Atheline hoped not. It would spoil the nice mornings which he intended to devote to Helena to have this strange woman imported.

"Is there anything I can do to please you, Helena, and make your life less wearisome?"

"Yes," said Helena, blushing. "About Marshmere—your house? I do not think Lord Gower considered that he ought to give any orders on

your estate. You see," she said, timidly, "there were some pensioners on your mother, who received a weekly allowance of money and those numberless little luxuries which came from 'the great house.' The stream which supplied these has been turned by her death into another direction. There is a poor youth dying of consumption and two bedridden old women, who would have died long since on parish allowance, whose lives have been prolonged for several years from your dear mother's continued bounty."

Sir Atheline's lips twitched in suppressing his inclination to laugh. He had no sympathy for bedridden old women, and felt that, taking the matter in the light in which a political economist would regard it, the two in question would be better allowed to follow the course indicated by nature and the parish. However, in compassion to Helena's folly and weakness, he kept his opinion to himself.

"You would like, my dear child," he said, protectingly, "that these charities should be continued. They certainly shall—for the pre-

sent, till I am better represented at Marshmere."

"Better represented?" asked Helena, interrogatively.

"Yes. I was doubtful whether to sell or let the old place. You know, like the dweller in Wordsworth's poem, in 'The Halls of Ivor,' I am 'the sole survivor.' The entail ceases with me."

"Oh!" said Helena, "I thought you seemed so vexed yesterday that the place should go to ruin."

"Naturally," replied the young man. "It is not likely to tempt the buyer as it now stands."

"Probably," observed Helena, dryly, "your uncle, Lord Gower, did not anticipate your selling your birthright;—for a mess of pottage," she added, trying to smile.

"Of what may the pottage be composed?" airily said Sir Atheline. "When this tiresome arm of mine heals I thought of taking some place in Leicestershire. There is the excitement of war in the chase, and, as Jorrocks says, only

twenty-five per cent. of the danger. You do not like the idea?"

"My liking is of little consequence," said the girl, "but——"

"Well," said Sir Atheline, impatiently, "say on."

"I am only a woman, and know little, but I should have thought that when a place was inherited, duty and pleasure would have combined to make its possession a blessing to those who dwell on its acres. I do not see that because you wish to ride well forwards with the hounds in Leicestershire, you can without sin delegate your duties to those on whom your poor will have less claim than on yourself."

"The claim would be about the same. What would you have me do, Helena—marry a respectable calico merchant's daughter for her money, and settle down at Marshmere for the rest of my days, and hear the horrid little school children twang out the responses, and to 'God their cheerful voices raise,'—cheerful and discordant?"

"I should have thought," said Helena, "that it would not have been necessary to marry for

money. Your income is ample, and your dear mother took so much trouble in clearing off the mortgages that your estate might be unencumbered."

"That is true," replied the young man, uneasily, who was about to conclude another mortgage on his property; "only one never seems to have money enough."

Helena was silent. She did not find her young friend come quite up to her notion of what she had expected. She was thoughtful, and returned to stitching a piece of embroidery as if life depended on the accuracy of her needle. She was a very accurate person both in small as well as in great things.

Some tender memories of his mother and recognitions of doctrines taught by her, made Sir Atheline look earnestly at Helena. He felt rather than remembered the truth of Akenside's description of a beautiful girl:

> "The cheek fair blooming, and the rosy lip,
> Where winning smiles and pleasures sweet as love,
> With sanctity and wisdom tempering, blend
> Their chaste allurement."

"Shall I marry Helena, and live steady ever

after, talk about crops, harry poachers, and be a county magistrate, and get a day's hunting occasionally—such a frightfully enclosed county, and game so well preserved that unfortunate foxes are cut off in their prime by rabbits dressed with strichnine specially for their eating?"

"Helena," he said, "I think you would make an excellent manager of the Marshmere property —nearly as good as my dear mother."

"You pay me a compliment," said Helena, gravely. "I have never seen anyone to be compared to your mother, either man or woman."

"No; but you are the nearest."

"Thank you," said the young lady, dryly. "I wish I could return the compliment."

"Then you do not think I resemble Lady Vernon. You told me yesterday that we were very like each other."

"That was personally, and I fancied the resemblance would extend to points of character and conduct."

"Dearest Helena, I suppose my mother had her season of youth when she had not attained

the strength and perfection of character which she possessed in middle age. Will you be my wife, and give me reasons for making my life such as she would have approved?"

Had Sir Atheline made this offer on the previous day, in the first glow of her joy at seeing some one who brought her deceased friend so vividly before her, Helena would probably have accepted him; but now she was chilled and disappointed, and said quietly:

"I have no intention of marrying at present. I thank you for your offer, but I fear we should not increase each other's happiness—our ideas seem so very wide apart."

"Oh, you do me injustice, Helena! It is only a vile habit I have acquired of never seeming in earnest even on subjects next to my heart—a kind of bantering manner with which one sometimes conceals the deep convictions of one's judgment. You could not really believe I am indifferent to what my mother would have wished? Rather never mount a horse again than run counter to any line of life she would have preferred. The dearest, ten-

derest, and yet the most high-souled woman who ever trod the earth!"

His eyes were full of tears, and his fine face glowed with emotion, which was for the moment sincere. Helena was softened by his enthusiasm, and her sweet countenance betrayed her change of feeling. His arm stole round her waist, and he pressed her fondly to his breast.

"My wife that will be," he said, with a little tremor of interrogation. "Say yes, Helena, or mean yes. Consent to marry me at once," he added, with self-distrust of temptations time might offer him.

"Oh, Atheline, how could you ask? It is not three months since that dear saint was taken from us."

"But do you not believe that she would joyfully have sanctioned my wishes had she been alive at this moment? Let the ceremony be as private as you please, but let it take place at once."

"Wait till the grave has closed over the fondest mother and the kindest friend a girl was ever blessed with, six months, and then, if we

are still in the same mind, I will be your wife," replied Helena.

Sir Atheline was silent. He did not like the delay, but he was partially reconciled to it from pecuniary reasons. He should be enabled to receive another half-year's rent from his estates before his marriage. Of course, Helena would like to go abroad—to travel comfortably, money must be abundant. He might get three months' additional leave from the Horse Guards on the plea of his new ties.

"It shall be as you wish, Helena; but I trust you will not throw me over when the time comes," he said, anxiously.

"I hope I shall find no reason," was the guarded reply.

This reminded Sir Atheline of his shortcomings.

"My dear," he cried, taking out of his purse two notes of ten pounds each, "you said something of my pensioners. Till we return to Marshmere together, never to leave it entirely again, will you arrange that this money is applied for their wants?"

"Thank you," said Helena, gratefully; "but

I will only deprive you of one of them for the present."

"I suppose," said the young man, "you will send it to Dermot to convey to the sick folks?"

"If you will permit," said Helena the prudent, "I will send a remittance to each by post order in your name. It will give them greater pleasure that their landlord should think of their necessities."

"Oh, Helena, that is a pious fraud! I never thought of what I never knew."

"Nay," said the girl, smiling; "but I did not remind you, and you proposed giving the money yourself when you knew that it might ameliorate suffering."

"All right," replied Sir Atheline, gaily, "I will do the Queen of Denmark business."

"What is that?" asked Helena, wondering.

"Never mind, dear," he said, kissing her, and running downstairs. "I will leave you to find out by the time I return to-morrow."

"I wonder," said poor Helena, "that he did not propose to spend an hour or two with me this evening—the first of our new relations.

Perhaps he was engaged before he knew I was here."

And she thus consoled herself. And with that dogged determination to grasp mental difficulties, which is the surest proof of what is named genius, the girl set herself to work to translate a fresh extract by some author she had not hitherto attempted.

"To-morrow," she said, "I shall be able to show him how much I have done."

CHAPTER X.

"And from the palace came a child of sin,
And took him by the curls and led him in."

AFTER a gay dinner, comprising both sexes, at Richmond, Sir Atheline found himself by the side of Captain Thornycroft, smoking a cigar and looking down on the shining Thames as it gleamed in the moonlight here and there, and then loomed away into dark shadows. Close at hand was the hotel, and from the warmer glow of the artificially-lighted room came glimpses of fair shoulders, and rich velvets, and the sound of eager voices, and the sight of handsome profiles as they bent forward to enforce some trivial request, or to reproach for some pretended slight.

Sir Atheline looked at the quiet moonlight, and then at the lighted room, and taking the

cigar from his mouth puffed the smoke deliberately from his close-pressed lips.

"One gets very sick of this kind of thing," he said at length.

"Which do you mean, the Thames or the moonlight, or——" and he nodded significantly in the direction of the window.

"Those sort of people," replied the youth.

"That is to say," replied his friend, "you have had a luxurious repast and are no longer hungry, expensive wines, and are conscious that you have imbibed enough, and you feel as Byron did, that the hour after dinner is the heaviest in the twenty-four."

"Oh! I don't know," reiterated the young man, wearily. "One does long for a glass of spring water sometimes when one's mouth is burnt by brandy;" and Sir Atheline's thoughts wandered back to the small house in Park Street, and to the pure deity enshrined therein. "I have made up my mind, as Falstaff says, to forswear such, and live cleanly like a gentleman," continued the youth. "These women

sicken me with their folly—their vice, if you will have the word."

"Ah! yes, they *are* wearisome when one has had their trifling a little too long," said his companion, Captain Thornycroft, who having found his friend's money useful on various occasions, meant to continue to lead and not to thwart him. To amuse must be his course. "Perhaps," he said, "if I had ever seen my beauty of Park Street again I might agree with you to 'forswear such, and live cleanly like a gentleman.'

"Have you not had another glimpse?" asked Sir Atheline, with pretended indifference and inward satisfaction.

"Not so happy," rejoined Captain Thornycroft, "yet I have tried several times; but to-morrow, about four o'clock, I'll take you to call on Mrs. Fairlight. She is perfectly proper, you understand, and beautiful enough to melt an iceberg. Her house has all the witcheries of Calypso's grot, and her Ulysses—that is, her husband—is at present abroad. Indeed, he seems in a chronic state of 'abroad.' However, he does the civil in allowing her seemingly an un-

limited order on his banker, and she seems to take advantage of it. Consequently she makes her house the pleasantest in London as a lounge. Being married, you see, there is no dread of being taken in by a managing mother to commit matrimony."

"A woman of a certain age, I suppose," said Sir Atheline, with all the proud conviction that his darling was but seventeen or eighteen.

"I do not know her age. She looks a perfect child. I believe her husband is a middle-aged profligate—purchased her, as one may call it, from her aunt, who did not like the burden of finding her in bread-and-butter. He soon seemed to have wearied of her, or she of him, so he leaves her monarch of all she surveys, and, by Jove! she seems to like the prospect."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Very. But I am a bad hand at descriptions—you had better come and see her."

"I don't suppose I should admire her."

"If so you will be very singular, for of many fellows who will not admit that she is regularly handsome, all declare that she is charming and

irresistible; but it is getting late, and these people must be gotten rid of. Come, old fellow, and have a glass of liqueur before we start for town."

When Captain Thornycroft was saying good-night to Sir Atheline, he reminded him of his engagement.

"I will call at your house at four o'clock."

"No, not at four; five will suit me better."

"At five then," said the soldier.

"I cannot leave Helena so soon as four o'clock. Dear Helena! how bright her image appears contrasted in thought with 'the bevy of fair damsels richly dight in gems and wanton dress' whom I have entertained this evening."

Helena had just so much of the playfulness of a girl left in her, as to run to the balustrade of the staircase to be sure that Sir Atheline was the person who had knocked and rang.

She saw the top of that beloved head; and perceiving that he was gently raising the curls on each side of his head, pressed down by his hat, she smiled to herself, and retired on tiptoe,

that he might not suspect his little tribute to vanity had been observed. "He wishes to look well in my eyes," the girl argued. And his welcome was more cordial on that account.

Encouraged by the happiness that seemed enthroned in her fine eyes, he ventured to kiss her; and though she put back his face gently, she showed no anger at a greeting so affectionate, and seemingly so innocent—for was she not to become his wife in six months' time?

"You will have to be on your best behaviour," she said, smiling, "for in three days' time Mrs. Rosemary says she thinks she shall be well enough——"

"What! you don't mean to say that dreadful woman is coming to sit with us always, Helena! You could not be so very absurd!"

"I fear, my dear Atheline, that my absurdity will extend even to that pitch. But *carpe diem*, Atheline, *carpe carpe*—I want you to help me with my Italian translation; I have been doing alone the extract we would not attempt together."

"That you have done," said Sir Atheline, "because you are determined to prove yourself a better pupil than I."

He spoke in jest, but there was a little bitterness hidden under it.

"Nay," said the girl, "I was only like a pioneer who breaks up the largest stones, but leaves to others the pleasure of making rough places plain. I have written out all the verbs, with their various meanings, in sequence; so you will only have to select the ones you think fit best the sense."

"You remind me," said Sir Atheline, stealing his sound arm round Helena's waist, as he seated himself by her side before the spread-out volumes, "of my dearest of mothers. When I returned home for the holidays, her wish was great that I should surpass all my competitors in my knowledge of the holiday task given by schoolmasters; but this desire was at war with her love for me, and determination that I should be happy whilst at home. The result of this division of interest in her mind was, that she looked out all the verbs, substantives, and ad-

jectives, and wrote them out clearly with the English, and in all their varieties."

"And what was the result?" asked Helena.

"The result was, that, like an idle boy, I ran my eye over her list and believed that I had mastered it; and, of course, could not remember a word of it when the lesson had to be repeated. Had I been compelled to look out all the words myself, some of them would probably have lingered in my stupid head; as it was, my brain remained, like Viola's life, 'a blank, my lord!' And I, instead of being put up, was put down in my class, to the grief of my dear mother, who recognised with pain that there is no royal road to learning, whatever the Delphin Virgil may promise."

"Oh! but this Italian is only an amusement."

"More than an amusement — a pleasure; because I work with you, Helena. But don't you think we might try one of Petrarch's sonnets? There is one I saw when I opened this book," (producing one), "this morning, which begins in a way that reminded me of you:

'Placid repulses, and austereness sweet.'

Look! is not the binding charming?—white Russia leather and gold."

"You extravagant boy!" cried Helena; but she blushed with pleasure, and smiled when Sir Atheline turned to the first leaf and showed her name, with the date of the day when she had bound herself to him.

The time passed so swiftly that morning that the time-piece struck half-past four before the lover tore himself away.

Wilmot wanted him to depart, for she liked her mistress to enjoy her frugal dinner and tea at one meal, which was served at five o'clock.

Helena had employment and enjoyment enough for the evening in trying to render into poetical English the perfection of sonnets, composed in the most musical language in the world.

When Sir Atheline reached home, he found Captain Thornycroft in an irritable state of mind, partly from having to wait for his friend, partly from the state of brain consequent on the debauch of the previous night.

"Why don't you order in some more soda-

water?" he cried. "There was but one bottle left in the house, and that was badly corked, and had half evaporated."

"Beg pardon. Six dozen shall be kept for your special drinking in future. Suppose you try a glassful of the pure element instead?"

"No, I thank you; I will wait till we get to the club."

When arrived there, Sir Atheline ordered a glass of brandy and soda also,—not that he wanted it particularly; it was as much from idleness as thirst; but brandy thus imbibed is like a publican who scores up a long bill not demanded in money down, but sure to be paid for by the victim in the future.

However, for the present, both young men could afford to laugh at prudence.

CHAPTER XI.

"O, Father! what a hell of witchcraft lies
In the bright orb of one particular tear."

MRS. FAIRLIGHT'S residence was a handsome house in Grosvenor Square. What struck Sir Atheline most forcibly was the almost ghost-like silence of everything. The footmen, in their grey and cherry-coloured liveries, had the gentlest of voices and the stealthiest of steps; the foot sunk into the deep pile of the carpeted staircase as they ascended.

Captain Thornycroft, followed closely by Sir Atheline, heard a lady's voice, when the names of the visitors were announced, exclaiming, in a sweet tone of languid reprehension,—

"How stupid! Did not Finette tell you that I was indisposed, and could see no one?"

"They are here, madam," said the footman. And feeling exceedingly awkward, the gentlemen stood, not knowing what to do.

"Then let them come," was uttered, in a despairing voice; and the visitors entered the drawing-room, in the centre of which Mrs. Fairlight knelt on the floor by the side of a large box, partly unpacked, and surrounded by a square of sawdust.

She looked up at the gentlemen, half laughing, half vexed, at being caught under circumstances so unexpected. Her lovely face had none of the classical beauty of Helena's; but it was not the less irresistible. A lace handkerchief was thrown over her head, seemingly to defend the short curls of her dark hair from the dust. The light striking from the high window made the pattern of the lace in light shadow on her brow; a lace collar, tied by a blue ribbon, surrounded her throat, and a dressing-gown, which fell below her feet, of white merino, was tied in carelessly at the waist, and gave the proportions of a full bust and a slender waist.

"Will you permit me to present my friend, Sir Atheline Vernon, to you, Mrs. Fairlight?"

She arose and bowed, and then knelt down again.

"I fear we have intruded—you are indisposed, Mrs. Fairlight?"

"I *was* indisposed. Having seen you, I am so no longer, Sir Atheline," she replied, in answer. "Captain Thornycroft said something about bringing you, but I had forgotten it. Pardon the seeming rudeness, but then I had not made your acquaintance. *Now* I feel that I might have been ill, but I could not have been 'indisposed.' In truth," she said, "this must be my excuse," pointing to the box of sawdust. "I wrote to Paris to Mr. Fairlight to send me some biscuit figures. I only asked for two, leaving them to his selection; but he has sent me six; and I was unpacking them myself, to have the pleasure of seeing order and beauty rising from chaos."

"Let us assist you," said Sir Atheline, kneeling down by her side.

"Ah, yes! let *me* help," cried Captain Thornycroft, not wishing to be left out.

"Think of your clothes," said the lady; "the sawdust will spoil them."

"Never mind," cried Sir Atheline, recklessly.

"No. The only way in which I can permit you to assist me, is by agreeing to take off your coats, and putting on James's and William's undress jackets, and their large aprons."

Laughing at the idea, the young lady rang the bell, and desired the footman to bring two clean jackets and aprons.

The young men enjoyed the joke; and being conducted by the footman to a dressing-room, they returned and knelt down beside their beautiful mistress in the character of servants.

A large crumb-cloth had been placed under the box, and as Sir Atheline removed the sawdust delicately from the figures till they were almost free, Captain Thornycroft lifted one from its place, and Mrs. Fairlight brushed off the remains of the particles of wood and of the dust.

"What a graceful creature!" cried the lady.

"What a likeness!" exclaimed the Captain.

"Of whom?"

"Oh, it is only a chance resemblance, I fancy. I thought I had seen some one like it."

Captain Thornycroft recognised it as being modelled from the beautiful dancer with whom it was said that the English millionaire was entangled; but that little piece of information he kept to be used in private for some ends of his own. The companion figure was the same dancer in a different attitude.

Mrs. Fairlight innocently touched them with loving care, and removed some china vases to allow them a place on the chimney-piece.

Then came a goatherd and a Spanish girl, and last of all a Venus and Cupid and an Italian peasant woman bending over her infant asleep in her arms.

The face of Mrs. Fairlight, so gay and sparkling in its usual phases, softened into tearful tenderness in sympathy with the expression of maternal love.

"Oh, that is heavenly!" she cried.

"Heavenly because so earthly!" said Sir Atheline, smiling.

"But we *are* earthly," said the lady impatiently; "and if anything in the world reaches heaven in its divinity, it is a mother's love."

"I will argue that out with you another time," said our hero, who was

> "One who liked an animated 'No,'
> To brush the surface and to make it flow."

"But now let us think where this divine mother of modern days and the divine mother of Greek worship are to be placed. The bases are too broad for the chimney-piece."

"Moreover," added Captain Thornycroft, maliciously, "it would be a pity to displace the dancers whom Mr. Fairlight chose for Mrs. Fairlight's chimney-piece."

"Oh!" said the unconscious lady, "Edgar would not care the least where they stand. But I think, Captain Thornycroft, that Chinese cabinet, if it did not stand so much in shadow, would be an excellent place for the beautiful Italian mother and for the Venus."

"Doubtless. Shall we move it to another position?"

"If you would not mind the trouble." But having said this, the young lady observed that Sir Atheline could only use one arm, and she repented of her assent as soon as it was uttered. She stood up and added her feeble strength to that of the young man. Unfortunately Chinese cabinets are ignorant of rollers, and this one was heavy.

"Stop: let us take out the drawers," said Mrs. Fairlight, "and then it will be lighter."

She took out several and handed them to the gentleman to place on the table. At length one resisted, and then yielding suddenly, occasioned her to stumble, and thus the corner struck Sir Atheline's arm. An expression of intense pain passed over his face, and Mrs. Fairlight flushed crimson, and tears came to her eyes. Her manner, which before had been that of playful coquetry towards both gentlemen, now suddenly turned to unmistakeable earnest, when she u tered that expression of pain which he only betrayed in his countenance.

"It was a pang, but now I feel it not;
It was an agony, but now forgot,"

said the young man, as the suffering of the jar on the exfoliating bone subsided.

"Are you sure it is better?"

"I'm sure I do not feel it now, scarcely at all."

"Pray don't spoil that young fellow, Mrs. Fairlight. Those wounded men get so conceited."

"There is nothing to be conceited about," said Sir Atheline, "for the conceit must be divided amongst many survivors of the six hundred. But let us finish our good deeds, and put the cabinet in its fresh place; it moves much more easily now the drawers, full of specimens, are removed."

When this had been done, and the groups elevated to their proper position, and looked at with heads first on one side and then on the other, of the three young spectators, it was agreed that nothing could be better.

"I am really obliged to you, very," said the young lady; "and now, since you have been so useful, I will have this box of sawdust cleared away, and you shall have your tea with

me. James shall enable you to resume your proper shapes, and by that time I shall be ready to pour it out. It is a pleasure to have the company of such industrious gentlemen. I mostly 'sip and spill my solitary tea.'"

When they returned, the young men looked round the room in which they had displaced and replaced the furniture. It had made them feel very much at home, and both had immediately a great interest in its arrangement.

Mrs. Fairlight came back in a few minutes in a morning dress, having dismissed the dressing gown, and with a blue ribbon passed through the curls of her dark hair. The conversation was very animated and playful, if not very sensible.

"Mrs. Fairlight, please you must give me a cup of tea first, because, though that fellow is a baronet, I shall be a peer if my uncle, Lord Wynne, has no son, and I was the most efficient workman when we appeared in the character of your footmen."

"But Sir Atheline suffered in the cause, and ought to be treated with indulgence on that account."

"What a fine logician is a woman!" cried Captain Thornycroft. "I suppose if a workman fell from a scaffold you would reward him rather than the one who succeeded in building your house?"

"I would repay them both," replied Mrs. Fairlight; "but I should attend first to the wounded one."

"And if you were a general, you would reward a defeat as well as a victory?"

"Pray don't puzzle me so! I never was considered clever," said the lady, laughing. "What can it signify? I would make all the world happy if I could. The greatest happiness to the greatest number. Am I not right according to the political economists?"

"Oh! you are both too deep for me!" cried Sir Atheline, enjoying the cup of tea which Mrs. Fairlight had given to him, whilst she talked to his companion.

"True; lovely Thais sits beside thee," said

the Captain, "and you take the goods that she provides thee."

"I *am* lovely, but my name is not Thais, but Claudine."

"A beautiful name!" cried the Captain; "but somehow connected with the idea of——"

"False wizard! avaunt!" cried Sir Atheline.

"What does he mean?" asked the lady, helplessly.

"It only means that once upon a time your name, with one letter removed, subjugated many men, as no doubt the lady who bears it does at this present time."

"Ah! you are both too clever for me," said Claudine; "but I forgive you as I look round the room."

"Do you not think," suggested Sir Atheline, "that those two groups require some single figure, something spiral, to make a centre—an apex?"

"My sisters make wax flowers very well," said Captain Thornycroft, eager not to be left out of the conference.

"I have seen some of their work—the flowers were very beautiful; but there is an objection to

every flower with a slender stem; such flowers look stiff in their wire immobility. I do not think any wax flowers are true in their likeness but camellias and waterlilies. From neither of these do we expect movement, but there is a necessity to their well-being which destroys the illusion—the glass shade, which reveals the effort to make fragile things permanent which are in their nature transitory,—and thus they lose their reality to me; but we will adjourn the debate."

"Willingly," cried the young man; "for adjournment means renewal, and the tea is exceedingly good, Mrs. Fairlight,—so good, that it bore even the admixture of hot water, which I detected you leaving at the bottom of my cup, when Sir Atheline's was not so diluted."

Claudine laughed and blushed at having been detected. "It is true," she said; "the teapot was so full of leaves, that I was conscious there was not enough for another full cup. I was very unselfish, for had I been alone I should have had a good honest cupful of strong tea, and mine was like London milk—more than twenty per cent. of water."

"Shall I see you at Lady Sotherland's this evening?" Captain Thornycroft asked.

"I may look in, if I have time; but I promised the Duchess of Doncaster to be with her early."

"*Au revoir*, then," said the Captain. He bowed himself out, followed by Sir Atheline; but just as the latter was leaving the room Claudine saw that he had dropped his handkerchief on the ground close to the chair he had occupied. She picked it up, and as he turned to look for it gave it to him, holding out her hand to shake his, a favour she had not granted to his companion. He took the proffered fingers reverently and pressed his lips to their delicate pink tips. Too quickly for observation or reproach, he was down the stairs overtaking his unsuspecting companion. Deeply piled stair-carpets have their advantages, as have also stone steps, for they don't creak.

"What do you think of her?" asked the Captain, when he got into the street.

"One of the most charming women I ever saw," replied Sir Atheline.

"She does not quite equal in beauty my ap parition in Park Street, though."

"No," said Sir Atheline, musing; "not quite."

"How can you tell? You were not with me when I saw her?"

"Well, my dear fellow, you have raved so incessantly about your beauty, that I thought I must say something civil. I know the young lady by inventory, black crape trimmings and all."

"But you think Claudine very pretty?"

"I think her charming. I do not know any other word that describes her so well. She is perfectly natural and unstudied in all her movements, and at the same time perfectly graceful. Is she a coquette?"

"No, I think not. I have never seen her show such a preference for one man over another, that he would have any good reason to complain of subsequent neglect." This observation set Sir Atheline musing. He had formed an idea, he thought probably on unsufficient grounds, that Mrs. Fairlight did prefer him to Captain Thornycroft. He looked at

his companion, and thought him a finer looking fellow than himself—not so handsome in face, but taller and broader in the chest—older, too, by a few years, and stronger in constitution to resist the wear and tear of dissipation. The result of his observations was that he had rather go alone to the parties that night for which he had engagements. He thought of Helena, and whether he was right in his desire to see Mrs. Fairlight again. "There would be no doubt at all if she were an unmarried girl," he said to himself; "but as I could not marry Claudine, it is only for the gratification of a little harmless curiosity that I wish to see her again, and to make up my mind whether vanity on my part alone gave rise to the idea that she preferred me to a man she has known for a much longer period.

CHAPTER XII.

"To one thing constant never."

So that night Sir Atheline went first to the assembly at Doncaster House. He was three-quarters of an hour wending his way upstairs,—and during that period he was nearly stifled by mouthfuls of lace and gauze, crammed therein by the pressure of round arms, standing on the stairs above him. At length he reached the doorway, and looked on to the promised land between the multitudes that stood before him. These were only transitory glimpses snatched sometimes between the arm and the side of a gentleman, or below the heads of some fair ladies less adorned than their neighbours. There was a sound of music, dulled by the hum of voices, and for an instant, over the broad expanse of a grand piano, Sir Atheline saw the beautiful countenance of Mrs. Fairlight. Her hands were extended

over the keys of the piano, her head thrown back, showing a round white throat, as the face was uplifted playfully to that of a gentleman who leaned over her. There was a crowd of men congregated, all eagerly gazing on her as the centre of attraction.

"How pleased she seems," Sir Atheline said, bitterly. He observed her further, in the hope of finding fault with her dress, but that was hopeless. It was composed of light-green satin, and over the full bust were folds of lace-blond. The waist was slender, and from it depended rich folds of satin that caught partial lights and shadows, after a manner beloved of painters. A magnificent row of diamonds round her throat, with a dazzling cross of some yet larger, bracelets, and a brilliant star on her bosom of the same precious stones, completed her toilette, with the exception that she wore a single ribbon in her hair, but green instead of blue.

Claudine objected to any ornament on her head that implied weight, or might in any way prevent her turning it as freely as she chose.

"She is very lovely," said Sir Atheline to himself, "and other men seem to think so. I consider it very wrong to go out into the world and turn men's heads in this fashion. What can that brute Fairlight be about to permit it? It is a woman's duty to sit at home and arrange her household."

Just then he remembered how he had assisted her in placing unknowingly the statuette of her husband's mistress in the most admirable position, and could not but admit that her household gods were but unattractive ones, with forehead of brass and feet of clay.

The endless craving that he should obtain some recognition from her of his presence increased on him. "It was no business of his—of an engaged man," he told himself; but Sir Atheline had never denied himself the fulfilment of a wish when such could be obtained. He had reached the doorway of the principal room, and found further progression was utterly impossible. He stood in the full tide of couples intent on their way to the supper room. There was nothing to be done but to make himself as small

as possible, as indeed he felt, and "let the world wag as it will," though he was neither "free nor easy."

Presently, before he was aware, there was a gleam of diamonds, a rustle of satin, and clinging to the arm of a royal duke, and driven by the pressure of his portly person against Sir Atheline, Claudine passed, or rather was dragged by him all unconscious of his proximity. The young lady was smiling gaily at some straightforward compliment paid her by royalty—in truth, had not a thought of Sir Atheline in her head. Why should she? But the young man's mortification was bitter, all the more because he knew it was unreasonable. He tried to think of Park Street and of the Vestal there immured; but his imagination turned involuntarily from the quiet room, the table with grammar and dictionary, and Helena's classic beauty and grave studiousness, to the brilliant creature who had just swept by him, and toward whom he felt the attraction of jealousy and vanity.

Angry with himself, with Mrs. Fairlight, and

with Helena, for no better reason than that she was not Claudine, he went to his club, and lost a higher sum at cards than was at all convenient to a young fellow who wanted to marry six months hence.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Love, like other little boys,
Cries for hearts as they for toys;
Which, when he is tired of play,
Wantonly he flings away."

On the following morning, Sir Atheline did not rise till late, and after breakfast he went to Park Street. When, he entered the drawing-room and was advancing with an affectation of sprightliness towards Helena, he caught sight of a stout lady whose existence had been hid behind the angle of the door. He stopped, looking disconcerted, and Helena, addressing her *chaperone*, introduced her to him as Mrs. Rosemary.

It was unfortunate that she should have arrived so soon for the good understanding of the lovers. It was not to be wondered at that Helena should feel constrained in the presence of the lady chosen for propriety's sake. Her voice

became *staccato* in its measured words, and her figure rigid. Beautiful she must be; for her statuesque head and its smooth braids could present no appearance which did not claim that epithet; but she was less attractive than on the previous visit.

She had seemed to Sir Atheline all his own. He had a tremulous sense of possession, barred only by the purity of his affianced wife, and the reverence she inspired by her innocence and virtue. Now another barrier was placed between them, and, in truth, the obstacle was a vulgar one. How could this go on for six months? Sir Atheline, being a gentleman, had addressed the companion on his first introduction, and hoped she had quite recovered from her late illness, wishing all the time in his heart that she were still confined to her bed at Brighton.

"Thank ye, sir, you're very kind. I *am* better, or I should not be here. Of course, I came as soon as I could, knowing that young folks can't be trusted to have their own way, and want looking after."

Helena flushed crimson, and Sir Atheline smiling, said, "Very true, madam; I have no doubt your opinion is grounded on the personal experiences of past years."

Mrs. Rosemary did not in the least understand the innuendo, but gathering from the quiet tone that some compliment was intended, she went on swimmingly.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" she said, smiling sweetly at Helena. "I shall get on very well with Miss Pevensy I dare say by-and-bye, but girls will be giddy."

"Miss Pevensy!" cried Sir Atheline; "I'm shocked to hear this!"

As he uttered these words his mouth was compressed by the effort not to laugh, for of anything so unlike giddiness as poor Helena's sad expression, staid deportment, and deep mourning, he had never dreamed.

"Yes, sir," the lady continued; "she is a bit giddy, but that will wear off. She is but young. But the draughts of cold air I have to put up with no one can tell. Miss Pevensy seems as if she was afraid of being stifled, and she is

always opening the window and bringing in the cold air on my neck, or the door, and then the draughts all up to my knees are dreadful. And for a person just come out of the rheumatics, my sufferings are great."

"Dear me!" cried Sir Atheline; "would it not be better that you should return to Brighton for a little while? There is something so curative in the Brighton air."

"Why, you see, Sir Atheline, I am under orders from Lord Gower—such a nice gentleman, and such a kind friend. He was at school with my dear lost saint, now gone to heaven, and he gave him the living we had for years. So now I can make him some return by looking after this young lady. Of course I like to do my best and show my gratitude, and I dare say Miss Elena will show her sense of it by shutting the windows and doors."

"You are an Italian scholar, I presume, madam?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! I beg pardon. I thought, from your pronunciation of Miss Pevensy's christian name,

that you were. And I had hoped you would have assisted us in our studies."

Mrs. Rosemary smiled, and replied, "Oh! my dear husband always said I had a most musical voice, and I ought to learn Italian. It would be a most interesting study."

She screwed up her little eyes, and put her head on one side as she said this.

"Very true," said the gentleman. "I am sure you will be a most apt scholar. So the best thing you can do is to learn."

He opened the grammar (Veneroni's) at No. Three of Familiar Phrases, and recommended her to learn that page.

"You will find it so interesting, as you said, madam. You will have to say, 'I have a pain in my heart;' and the answer is, 'You must keep in bed.' I am sure that is excellent advice to give an invalid."

Mrs. Rosemary took the book as if it had been a dose of medicine. She had spoken only in the desire to talk of herself, and had no idea Sir Atheline would have taken her at her word.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

reproach in her tone—"so it was to my dear Lady Vernon."

Sir Atheline started up. He had reached Park Street in an irritable state of brain, from stimulants taken on the previous night, not diminished by brandy-and-soda in the morning.

His ill-temper had been increased by the sight of Mrs. Rosemary, and Helena's proficiency had brought his childish fury to a climax.

"I had rather not have my mother's name referred to, Helena," he said. "I have a headache this morning, so I will go and take a turn in the Park to see if the fresh air will dispel it."

"Will you not return?" she asked, timidly, fearing she had wounded him.

"No,—not to-day, I thank you." He arose, shook hands with her carelessly, and, with a bow to Mrs. Rosemary, he was gone.

"My dear Miss Pevensy," said that comfortable-looking companion, "I think you were imprudent in asking the young gentleman if he would not return. It does not do to spoil men so. Excuse me, miss, but when my dear husband that's gone used to come a-courting of me,

after a bit he got tired—at least, I thought he did. The wedding was to be in four months' time, when he was to get that living that Lord Gower gave us. You see, the gentleman that held it had got tired of churching, and thought he should get more by farming. Well—Mr. Rosemary, he did not come quite so often as he had, and as the time grew shorter he kept away more. Says my mother to me, 'Sure as he's alive we'll have him up for breach.' 'Mother,' says I, ''twill all come right. I'd as soon be a farmer's wife as Jack Rosemary's; and Mr. Boroughs, the clergyman that is, the farmer that is to be, makes sheeps' eyes at me whenever we meet; and when Jack was changing his gown in the vestry, Will was walking home with me from church, and Jack saw him from the vestry window,—I saw him peeping. Jack came fast enough that evening; but I was shy, and would not tell him what we had talked about, for 'twas only about turnips and slugs. I took a few more walks with Will Boroughs, and then Jack grew crazy to marry me. But, bless you!—if Will hadn't been there to aggravate him, I

might have been Mary Rose to this day instead of Mrs. Rosemary."

"And did he love you?" said Helena, looking at the plump, comfortable figure before her, who had an expression of low cunning in her face.

"Love is no word; he *doated* on me. And why not, I should like to know? His house was always kept comfortable; he had the easy-chair out of the draught; his dinner was always well cooked. I carved, and gave him all the tit-bits, which he would have been ashamed to take himself. We had no children to make dirt and noise, as they always do, so we were quite comfortable."

"Were you not very unhappy when you lost so good a husband?"

"Yes, Miss Pevensy. I grieved as all good widows ought to do. At the same time I had taken care that he should insure his life, and I saw that the premiums were paid up in good time. What really did grieve me was turning out of the Rectory house; for after my dear John died, I got accustomed to the warm corner he

had sat in all his life, but at the end of the month out I had to go."

"And then?" asked Helena.

"Why then, miss, I took a small house in a pleasant country town. I had my furniture, so that was cheaper than lodgings, and there I lived comfortable—(it is not a draughty house at all)—till I got rheumatism, and I went to Brighton for a change. But there was nothing but draughts there. They are always waiting at the corners of the streets to kill people; and I got worse. But when I got Lord Gower's letter I came off as soon as I could."

"I am afraid," said Helena, kindly, "that you came at a great sacrifice of comfort?"

"Well, as to that," said the widow, "my lord will make it up to me in money—as much as money can make up for a stiff knee-joint and aching pain, but if you would not mind having the door shut, my dear Miss Pevensy, it would make it so much easier for me."

"I will, indeed," said Helena, fearful that she had been selfish and thought only of her own comfort.

"But did you say that Lord Gower would pay you for living with me?"

"Yes — certainly." And Mrs. Rosemary thought—"gratitude is a fine thing, but I never saw his lordship in my life. What he did for John he's not done for me, and so, start fair, say I; if I do your lordship a service you must pay me for it."

CHAPTER XIV.

"To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares,
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs."

This set Helena thinking of her obligations to Lord Gower. She knew that the interest in the Three per Cents. of a thousand pounds was all her wealth—fifteen pounds every half-year. How would that pay for all that she was now expending? She must consult Wilmot. Wilmot paid the weekly bills. There was Mrs. Rosemary also expecting to be paid by Lord Gower for giving the protection of her society to her. Painfully she became aware of her dependence. With Lady Vernon she had never felt that she had been—or could be—a burden; but Lord Gower, Lady Gower's brother, was united by no ties of blood with herself. Whatever she had required of indulgence it had been Lady Vernon's pleasure to supply to this young girl—

her adopted daughter. Long habit had made Helena bold in stating her wishes for indulgences—masters, music, books, new dresses—all she wished for came as at the command of Aladdin's lamp, but she was uneasy at dependence on one whom she could never repay. She was aware that love and companionship had balanced pecuniary obligation, but to Lord Gower she was nothing, except as the affianced wife of his nephew, and of that claim he was not aware.

She hated to speak on the subject to Wilmot; she dreaded to own her poverty and her fear of pecuniary embarrassment. She must impress on Wilmot the necessity of economy; and after a final effort to overcome her repugnance, she rang for Lady Vernon's maid.

"I trust you are comfortable here, Wilmot?"

"Oh! yes, miss, I thank you. The places are small after what I have been accustomed to, but it is a heaven on earth in sweetness and airiness after where we were before at Mrs.

Lyster's, and I contrive that we shall have what is wholesome to eat and drink."

"I hope you are economical, Wilmot—I should like to see the weekly bills."

"Certainly, Miss Pevensy, if you like to take the trouble; but my lord said you were to live comfortable, that is, as comfortable as you could after your great loss, miss; and I have not gone to any expense my lord would think out of the way."

"Who is to pay you?" cried Helena, driven to desperation.

"My lord will, no doubt, when he comes back; and he left me a good sum of money, and said I was to write for more if I wanted it."

"Thank you, Wilmot, you may go," said Helena, glad that the maid should not see the falling tears which flowed in tribute to Lord Gower's kindness. "Atheline, when we marry, must repay the money, though nothing can repay the kindness," she said to herself.

The thought of Sir Atheline—brought back his image as she last saw him—his face flushed unnaturally; his eyelids hot—his tone and

manner irritable. Womanlike, she fancied she had been in fault, for both Lady Vernon and Helena were water drinkers, and she certainly could never suspect the symptoms of intemperance in another, and that other her future husband. She felt mortified that Sir Atheline should have to pay for her board for the three months before she became his wife; and then she wept bitter tears of helplessness, and wished that the dear boy had been in a better mood when he had last called at Park Street.

She was in a distressed state of mind when she returned to the drawing-room, which she found unpleasantly warm and airless from Mrs. Rosemary's dread of draughts. That worthy woman was sitting with a basket of worsteds and canvas before her, doing what she called her genteel work; but she had a grievance evidently by her face, and as Helena had shut the door as soon as possible on her entrance, thereby excluding the small chance of additional fresh air, she felt she must wait for Mrs. Rosemary to elucidate the mystery.

"Are you not feeling well, madam?" asked

Helena, after a long silence on the part of the woman with a grievance.

"Well, Miss Pevensy, I don't feel to-rights, and that is the truth, so I had better mention it at once."

Helena's heart gave a great leap. She hoped Mrs. Rosemary was about to say that she could not remain any longer; but no such luck was in store for Helena.

"My dear Miss Pevensy! I have borne with it several days, and I feel my strength deserting me."

There was a pause, and Mrs. Rosemary looked as if she expected Helena to appear concerned, and she only appeared politely expectant.

"Perhaps, miss, you have some complaint that don't suit with fermented liquors, as you never drink ale, nor wine, nor brandy. Now, when I am at home I have a good glass of ale or porter at my dinner, and a glass of hot hollands and water before I go to bed. Now I feel such a sinking;" and she pressed her hand on her stomach; "such a sinking for want of my usual

comfort at meals, that I feel I can bear the want of it no longer."

Helena looked much distressed, for she wished her bills to be as low as possible, since she was to be indebted to a stranger in blood to pay them.

Mrs. Rosemary went on. "Surely, Miss Pevensy, you must have been accustomed to wine and ale, not to say stout, when you lived with Lady Vernon? Where is the use of pretending to live like a lady,—where is the good of being one,—if you don't have your three glasses of wine every day, and a comfortable brewing of hollands at night?"

"Neither did Lady Vernon, nor do I, drink anything stronger than tea or coffee. I will think over the subject," Helena continued, "and let you know the result."

"I should have thought," said the elder lady, with some temper, "that but one opinion could be held on the subject."

Of this Helena took no notice, but retired to her room to combat with her perplexity. She summoned the faithful Wilmot once again,

and consulted her as to Mrs. Rosemary's complaints.

"I think, miss, that Lord Gower would not like that the lady should go without any comfort she is in the habit of having. I had better order some gin, some ale, some sherry, and port wine of some strength. I fancy Mrs. Rosemary will prefer that."

Helena did not know whether sherry should be strong or weak, or which was best. She had heard sherry termed dry one day by Lord Gower, which seemed to her a contradiction, for sherry was a fluid, and how could it be dry?

Helena had small appetite for her Italian, now that Sir Atheline had seemed to dislike the study; but she felt the same necessity for occupation which had been the thirst of poor Marie Antoinette's mind, when she unravelled the carpet of her cell, and made knitting-pins of the bits of stick brought for fuel. She would learn with or without a companion.

"Dear me, Miss Pevensy!" said Mrs. Rosemary, "to see you turning the leaves of that dictionary makes me quite vapoured. I should

think that if you wanted nice amusement, a piece of worsted-work like this would be quite a treat."

"I have a very elaborate piece of company work," said Helena, smiling, "but the very sight of it makes me feel stiff and uncomfortable."

Mrs. Rosemary expressed a desire to see it, and Helena produced some breadths of brown satin worked over in flowers made by floss silk, of which the effect was exceedingly rich and artistic.

Mrs. Rosemary could not but feel and express unwilling admiration, but the inspection recalled in her increased ill-temper, from envy of the superior material and superior workmanship of the border.

CHAPTER XV.

"For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form, and doth the body make."

When Atheline had left Helena, on that unfortunate day of lessons, he had walked away towards the park angry with all the world, especially with himself. Just as the door had closed on him, Captain Thornycroft had entered the street, and having turned naturally and involuntarily towards that portion of it where he had seen the lady disappear whom he so much admired, he discovered not the lady, but his friend Sir Atheline, and was seized with jealous conviction that, hearing from him of the concealed beauty, Sir Atheline had stolen a march on him, and become a visitor to the house himself.

To the lazy curiosity felt by men who have no business to occupy them was now added the jest

of outwitting his friend who seemed certainly to have outwitted him.

Consequently, it was an amusement to watch the proceedings of the inhabitants of No. —, Park Street. One day, Helena, tired of seclusion and the heavy air of the drawing-room, asked Mrs. Rosemary to come into the park with her, observing that the weather was so mild that no harm, she trusted, would result in any increase of rheumatic symptoms.

Mrs. Rosemary agreed. She liked variety, and Helena had already and hitherto seemed to dislike walking with her, a suspicion which was well founded, for Helena did not admire the various trenchant colours with which Mrs. Rosemary called the eyes of the spectators to the wearer, who had once possessed a fresh kind of vulgar beauty, and who believed that possession to be still retained.

They strolled quietly towards the park, for it was a time of the day when few people were about. Captain Thornycroft, however, was at his post of observation, and could reconnoitre the ladies from afar at first, and then in greater

proximity. How could he help gazing at that graceful young figure in deep mourning, with her deeply veiled face, contrasted with the rotund little woman whose pincushion proportions were wrapped in a shawl of stripes, scarlet, light blue, yellow, and white, recommencing with scarlet, going again through the opposite primitives. These colours derived additional brilliancy by their apposition with Helena's sullen depths of mourning, silk and crape. Mrs. Rosemary's face was broad and sweet in expression, and the bonnet too small for the too ample countenance it accompanied rather than shaded. Her hair was disposed in short curls round her brow. Helena had been tempted, when Mrs. Rosemary came down dressed, to ask her to exchange her shawl for one less vivid in tint, but the smile of satisfaction that beamed over her whole expression stopped the request that hovered on Helena's tongue. "I know no one," was her mental observation. "It cannot matter by whom we are seen."

Mrs. Rosemary was one of those hapless persons to whom something is sure to happen. Some of those minikin misfortunes that irrated

her friends, though she herself bore them with amazing magnanimity. She liked to be the centre of interest even for a few seconds. Thus in receiving change, after making a purchase in a shop, she would declare suddenly that she had lost a sixpence—a favourite sixpence—a sixpence with a hole in it, drilled by her dear departed husband himself, and the pitying shopman would go down upon his knees to see where it had rolled, and passengers seeing the bended heads would stop believing a purseful of sovereigns and half-soverigns must be running about, when suddenly the interesting widow would with a thousand pardons declare she had found it in her sleeve after all. In a train in the last exciting ten minutes before the porter demands the tickets, and eager hearts are beating for home, she will have lost her ticket, and getting up will shake her clothes and lift the cushions, and beg the passengers to look under their feet, all in vain. Then she will turn out the contents of her pockets to the irritated gaze of her neighbours, who wish most fervently she would sit still, and bless her unawares in a reverse way for in-

terrupting their view of the windows, and the possible forms of welcoming friends on the platform. Of course the ticket is safe in her glove, as she finds when in despair of recovering it, she has decided to make ready for leaving the carriage. But the recovery is hailed by an exclamation of delight, and she claims the sympathy of her five companions in fluent tones of rejoicing, by no means disturbed by the utter disregard with which the information is received.

She prattled as she went along by Helena's side: "Dear me, Miss Pevensy, my dear! Is it not beautiful? The trees so green, and the skies so blue, and the walks so dry. I declare they are covered with quite a dust, mixed with little bits of stones. Bad for new boots. Yours are new I think, looking curiously at the fronts of Helena's toes, as they went in and out from the shadowing petticoats. I think your boots must be tight, my dear, your feet do look so unnaturally narrow. Now mine is a round foot—very pretty, and white, and plump, when the shoes are off, but yours beat them in boots. I dare say your feet are bony.

"Very likely," said Helena, "but don't speak so loud."

"Oh! as for that, my dear, we've got all the park to ourselves it seems to me. I should like to come out when there's company about."

Helena registered a vow that nothing should tempt her out under such circumstances.

"Dear me! there's one of those tiresome little bits of gravel got inside my boot. Oh! 'tis too bad of it! How it does hurt, Miss Helena! I must sit down when we get to that seat and get it out."

"Don't you think you could manage to bear it till we get back to Park Street?"

"Bear it, indeed! why should anyone bear what they need not? 'Tis bad enough to suffer what can't be altered," and Mrs. Rosemary with a little run and a few hops contrived to reach the seat.

Helena followed more slowly, and sat herself down by the side of her companion whom she thus hoped partially to screen from any passer-by, but to her great relief the park was particularly empty.

With her body most painfully doubled, Mrs. Rosemary began to unlace her boot. It was a troublesome performance for a stout lady, for the laces crossed. One jumped into a knot as she gave it a careless flick in unlacing it. That had to be undone before any relief could be obtained. How wilfully hard it had made itself! How it hurt her poor plump fingers and nails in trying to undo it.

At length it was accomplished. Mrs. Rosemary fished out the offending bit of gravel, and offered it curiously to Helena's inspection.

"See how it must have hurt!" she cried, while marks that her labours had been arduous in removing it from its lurking-place stood on her nose and brow.

"I think if you will lace on that boot again, Mrs. Rosemary, I should like to go home."

"Oh, dear! what! so soon! Why we are so pleasant here! But just as you like, my dear," and she stooped again after having used her handkerchief to wipe her flushed face.

Helena's dainty senses were revolted by her companion. She rose and walked slowly towards

home, meeting a gentleman, who looked at her with admiration disguised by respect.

Helena walked like a queen. There was nothing tripping nor careless in her gait; a glance, averted immediately, showed the admirer this fact. Following her was Mrs. Rosemary, puffing, flushed, and rolling along on her little plump feet, which seemed to be rounded instead of flat at the soles. Captain Thornycroft heard her address the stately beauty as soon as she overtook her.

"Well! Miss Pevensy, my dear, you might have stopped a few minutes. I declare, thinking that my duty to Lord Gower required me to stick close to you, I came after you before I had properly fastened this boot-lace, and it is very awkward to have it dragging along in the dirt; and if one happens to tread on it, 'tis apt to make one stumble—and to stumble in the streets is dreadful,—bad enough in one's own house,—and then if one has a boot-lace dragging in the streets, and there is no doorstep handy, what can one do?"

Helena could not answer this question: she

only made up her mind that, once safe at home, she would not be tempted even by the finest day to leave that hospitable shelter.

"It is a comfort to get home again," said the little fat woman on reaching No. —, Park Street.

Helena echoed the expression of thankfulness.

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Rosemary, looking at the cheeks slightly tinged with bloom of the young lady at her side, "that you never get hot."

"Perhaps it may be that my boot-laces do not become unfastened," said Helena, with a smile.

"I should not wonder," replied Mrs. Rosemary, not seeing the implied reproof; and probably considering that Helena's boot-laces were a better behaved set than her own, she sat herself down in the hall to inspect the damage to her boots.

"There now!" she cried, apostrophising Helena, who had already reached the top stair; "if I haven't trod off the tag of the lace, and the end is all unravelled; and how am I to lace it up again?"

Helena turned, and replied, "But you don't

want to go out again directly, and the servant can get you fresh laces."

"Well, Miss Pevensy! anyone can see you've been born with a golden spoon in your mouth. In my country money does not grow on trees, to fall into one's lap when the wind blows."

Helena's conscience was touched. She felt that she certainly had no chance of money, unless it were blown into her lap, and of the price of a boot-lace she had not the slightest idea; so she bore the innuendo in silence. She had only just reached the door of her bedroom when Mrs. Rosemary's voice was heard in a prolonged wail of distress, which Helena heard with the irritation of a person called down again just after they have mounted two flights of London stairs, steep in proportion to the height of the rooms.

"Oh! Miss Helena! Miss Pevensy! my dear young lady!"

The tones were so tragical that Helena turned round and began to descend. Mrs. Rosemary hopped towards her with one boot in her hand, and poured out her lamentations from the foot of the stairs.

"Oh! Miss Pevensy! I am ruined! undone —all my money!—'tis gone—I declare—I am in such trouble!" and the poor little woman burst into tears.

"What is gone? What has happened?"

"Oh, Miss Helena, my dear! you never knew what it was to be without a shilling in your purse, and I have; and now I've no shilling and no purse—'tis gone!"

"What—lost?"

"Yes, lost!"

Helena asked the usual question, "When did you see it last?"

"Oh! I had it in my pocket when I went out; 'twas all along with that nasty bit of gravel."

"There was no one scarcely in the park. You had better go and see if you can find it."

"Find a purse in London streets! Oh, Miss Pevensy, you don't know the ways of this wicked world!"

"Surely 'tis worth trying. Put on your boot, and go as fast as you can."

Mrs. Rosemary wiped her tears and squatted

on the stairs, essaying to put on the boot with the refractory lace. She took a pin from her dress, and, running it through the end of the lace, essayed to coax the unruly strands through the eyelet-hole, and succeeds only with one, whilst the other two are rolled up like a couple of periwinkles.

"Oh! dear! dear! I shall never get it ready in time, and the purse will be gone. Drat this lace! I wish I had never gone out on the gravel."

Helena sat down and unlaced her own boots; and taking the scissors from her chatelaine, she cut off the lace and gave it to her companion.

Mrs. Rosemary looked up with brimming eyes and thanked her with a sob. Having hurried on her boots, she was walking out of the house, till Helena arrested her.

"Oh! Mrs. Rosemary, you will lose your collar next. It is flying out behind you."

The little fat woman snatched at it, and drew it again round her neck.

"Oh!" with another wail, "I have lost the pin."

"Here is another," said Helena, with a sigh; for she thought it was the duty of every woman to carry pins about with her; but to teach Mrs. Rosemary tidiness was too arduous an undertaking, considering the ages of the respective parties.

CHAPTER XVI.

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

HELENA was grieved for Mrs. Rosemary's money trouble. The subject was connected with herself, and she contemplated it as one dwells on some unknown danger of which one cannot estimate the magnitude. Having no money meant being indebted to other people, and that she had been taught by Lady Vernon was one of the greatest disgraces which could befall anyone.

There are some exquisite lines by an American poet, which describe him as looking from his vicarage into the churchyard in which he had buried a darling child. Another climbs up and stands beside him, looking with him on the wintry scene. He goes on to say:

"I wept as I suddenly kissed her,
And she, kissing back, could not know
That my kiss was given to her sister,
Buried deep in the blinding snow."

With the same feeling of tender anxiety for Atheline, Lady Vernon enforced freedom from debt and frugality in expenditure on Helena. It was all meant for Atheline; but, as he could not be reached, Helena had the benefit of it. The poor mother, gazing at the marvellous beauty and grace of her young friend, could not but dwell on the hope that Atheline would love her and obtain her hand and heart. Thus she would discourse to Helena:

"No man can cherish any self-respect who is indebted to another in a pecuniary sense for anything which he cannot repay. Why do men and women run into debt? Only from intense selfishness."

"Is it so?" asked Helena.

"Why, of course it is. Did you ever hear of a man or woman going into debt to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked, or to release the prisoner from bondage? Men fancy rich food

and expensive wine. They indulge their palates, and say, 'Oh! we shall pay *some* time;' or they have the idea that they must dress what they call properly, that is to say, improperly, as they have become indebted to some fashionable tailor, and are the object of contempt to the journeyman who measures them."

So Helena was depressed by her companion's loss, for it reminded her of her own dependence.

The little, plump subject of her thoughts hurried on through the streets to the park. "Let me see: I walked this side and she on the other. I wonder if I took out my handkerchief as we went along; 'tis all over with me if I did." Then she thought she would look at the faces of the passers-by, and see if there was any unusual exhibition in their countenances. A lad passed her with his hands in his pockets whistling.

"You haven't seen a black purse with a snap to it, have you?" said she, in a persuasive tone.

"No," said the boy, "have you?"

The next interrogation was equally unavailing.

"Oh, miss! you haven't seen my purse, have you?—a black purse with a snap."

This was addressed to one of two young ladies walking, rather overdressed.

"Creature!" cried the first, "we would not touch your purse if we saw it lying on the ground."

"Oh!" said the poor woman, "I meant no harm."

These rebuffs made her unwilling to say anything more. She had a new idea also—that she had dropped the purse as she stooped down to unlace her boot at the seat. So she hurried on till she came within sight of the spot, and saw with dismay that someone had occupied it.

Captain Thornycroft, from a side walk, had heard Mrs. Rosemary's exclamations to Helena as she followed her with her boot half-unlaced.

"A Miss Pevensy, living at No. ——, Park Street, oh! Lady Chilcot's house—gone abroad with poor Ned Chilcot. Who can that vulgar old lady be? She used Lord Gower's name, if I am not mistaken." Thus meditated Captain Thornycroft, who, having seen the ladies sitting on the bench when he was in a different walk, now passed and looked at it, remembering which

side she had sat. As his eyes lingered for an instant, he saw something shining on the ground. It was neither large nor bright, but happened to catch an accidental ray of sunshine as he passed. He stopped, and found it was a purse of faded black leather with a metal snap.

Captain Thornycroft took it up and smiled. He knew at once that it belonged to the stout woman. Miss Pevensy never could have owned such an article as that. He held it delicately between the finger and thumb of his gloved hand with a disinclination to come into closer proximity with it. "Came out of her pocket," he said. "Queer things in that pocket, I dare say." Then he turned away from the bench, thinking how he could find out more about the mysterious beauty, so strangely accompanied, aided by the circumstances which had just occurred.

"I will keep my eye on that fat little woman," he resolved. "She will be out presently to look for her purse. Perhaps the beauty may accompany her."

To put the purse in his pocket would be

doing it too much honour. He did not like contact with anything of associations so doubtful. He held it gingerly by a steel ring, with as little damage to his lavender gloves as possible. Nearer inspection did not increase his respect. He dropped it with a look of disgust, and then carefully covered it with dust and gravel with the point of his toe.

Sitting down he crossed his legs, keeping his heel on the hidden treasure, and seemed to be contemplating the fleecy clouds which moved gently over the sky; but all the time one eye turned to the direction of Park Street.

Shortly after, he perceived the hurried approach of Mrs. Rosemary, and observed the trouble in her aspect, and the manner in which she challenged every passer-by, probably with inquiries as to her purse.

Captain Thornycroft's inspection of the clouds became more intense, though his disgust was great that the little fat woman should be alone. He was determined that she should first address him, and involuntarily he stamped his heel more fiercely on the dust-concealed purse.

She puffed up to him at length, whilst he sat with eyes seemingly unconscious of her presence.

She gazed at him with awe—his clothes were so faultless, and his boots! what pieces of perfection they were! one leg being thrown over the other, the wicked heel of which concealed the lost treasure; the upper foot moving gently in space, with its fine profile challenging admiration from the beholders.

Mrs. Rosemary's distress altogether overcame her timidity.

If one has lost a letter or a pocket handkerchief, or a key, the conviction is impressed on one's mind that it is concealed in the same manner as the slipper in that celebrated game; and I have known some energetic housewives never easy till every sedentary member has been routed up, till anxiety has been relieved and the missing article found.

"Oh, dear sir!" cried the poor woman, going at once to the root of the matter, "*will* you get up?"

"Get up, madam? Certainly, if you desire

it," rising and bowing; "but, pardon me, there is ample room, is there not, for that pleasant number—two?

"Dear me!" said poor Mrs. Rosemary, with a smile; "well, there, you *are* kind. I see it is not under you. And oh dear! the weather *is* warm, and I have walked so fast—run almost"—and her handkerchief was again in requisition.

Captain Thornycroft thought of Lady Caroline Whilhelmina Amelia Skeggs.

"You see, sir," said Mrs. Rosemary, seating herself, with feet that barely touched the ground, "I am an unfortunate woman."

"Indeed!" said the Captain, with eyebrows raised, and a mouth with rebellious corners.

"Yes, sir, I am indeed," said the poor woman, quite unconscious that she had said anything to provoke her companion's mirth.

"You see, I took a walk in the park to-day with Miss Pevensy."

"That is the young lady in whom Lord Gower is interested, I believe?" suggested Captain Thornycroft.

"Ah, sir, I see you know all about the circumstances."

"Well, says I, 'Miss Pevensy, my dear, do come out and enjoy the sun and fresh air a little, for you mope in all day and never see a soul except Sir Atheline.' Now, sir, Sir Atheline is all very well, though he don't seem to me so much of a gentleman as you are; but, says I, if a lady only sees one gentleman, how can she tell whether she should like anyone better? So I thought if she walked out, even if she did not speak to anyone, she would *see* different folks."

"Yes, well, but your distress?"

"Oh, sir!" the ready tears springing into her eyes; "she had no sooner come out than she wanted to go home again; and I had a bit of gravel in my boot, so I unlaced it, and somehow I fancied I lost it—my purse, I mean,—and all the money I have till my next dividend is due, and what to do I can't think. I fancied I had put it by my side when I sat down, but 'tis a dreadful thing; and Miss Pevensy—'tis my belief she knows nothing. I saw her give away half-

a-crown thinking it was a florin. Brought up by Lady Vernon; so ignorant, poor girl, she won't know nor care no more than a baby about it."

"I suppose Lady Vernon did not much care about the young lady, as she took so little trouble about her education?" asked the captain.

"Oh, dear! she doated on her, I have been told; and she was taught Greek, and Latin and modern languages, and music, and she sings, oh, beautiful! only she knows nothing about money, because everything was provided for her."

"Madam! I am overwhelmed with confusion at the hardihood of the proposition I am going to make, but under the circumstances in which you have confided to me your distress, would you permit me to send you a cheque for the amount you may have lost? I cannot bear that so charming a lady should be put to any inconvenience from a circumstance so trivial."

"Oh, dear! I really could not think of it," cried Mrs. Rosemary, who turned over in her mind the many troubles which the loss of her

money would occasion. "There's Betsy's wages will be due next week," she ran over in her head; "and there's a little bill at the linen-draper's, and one at the butcher's and butter-shop."

"Pray tell me the amount," said the remorseless captain, seeing the perplexity of her face.

"No, I thank you, sir. I am really grateful, but I cannot take such an obligation as that from a strange gentleman. Can you tell me, as I am a stranger to London ways, whether there's any chance of getting it back by advertisement, and saying, 'to be handsomely rewarded'?"

"Let us look carefully on the seat and under it," said the captain.

He stood aside, and Mrs. Rosemary looked under the seat, but her companion's pedal efforts had completely succeeded in covering the purse.

"It is not there," said Mrs. Rosemary, in a plaintive voice.

"Did you go further than this?" asked Captain Thornycroft.

"No;" with a hopeless shake of the head.

Here the captain gave a final poke with his

toe—a step in the right direction—and the ill-used receptacle of the poor lady's wealth stood revealed, though shorn of all its beams.

"Oh!" she cried, with a scream of genuine delight, "I am so happy! And only think that you should have found it for me!"

The captain had the proverb in his head—"Those who hide can find," but he only said he was very happy to have been the unconscious means of her recovering her money, and as, with a light heart, she walked towards Park Street, Captain Thornycroft attended, proceeding by her side.

"You mentioned Sir Atheline Vernon, I think? He is a great friend of mine."

"Dear me! only think of that," said the lady.

"Yes, we were inseparable—like brothers. But I have not seen so much of him lately. Probably his time has been occupied elsewhere."

"Ah, well! one must not tell tales out of school, you know, sir, and you are too much of a gentleman to go and tell against me, but 'between you and me and the bedpost,' as my dear hus-

band used to say when he had found out any little bit of parish news, but now it must be 'between you and me and the flowers'—they are engaged."

This was said in a tone of preternatural solemnity, with a fat finger-tip placed on the mouth.

"Ah! engaged, are they? I suppose they are very much attached to each other?"

"I dare say they are, sir."

"But are you not sure?"

"Well, people have different ways of showing their love. He seems as if he was ready to fall down and worship her, but she is a wonderful quiet young lady—very stately—like a queen. I should not think she was much given to loving, at least not according to my notion."

"Plenty of money, I suppose?" asked the captain, in a tentative tone.

"I don't know, but I suppose so. You see, sir, Lord Gower is her guardian, and so 'tis natural to suppose he has something to guard for her; and nothing is to be grudged for her comfort—that's the orders."

"She is not of age, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, only eighteen—a fine grown girl for that age, and sings like a nightingale. I cannot say I admire what Miss Pevensy sings—foreign, outlandish words. I like songs like what my husband used to sing, 'A Rose-tree in full bearing,' and 'Sally in our Alley.'"

"Certainly, there is nothing to equal the beauty of an English ballad. I dare say you sing yourself, madam; your voice is so peculiarly musical."

"Oh, dear sir! nothing to speak of."

They had now reached Park Street.

"Will you not favour me with the name of the lady to whom I am indebted for so delightful an hour's conversation?"

"My name is Rosemary, sir. I am sure I am greatly indebted to you for your kindness."

"*Rosa Marie*—Rose of the Sea—Rose of the Garden, blushing and gay," said the captain. "I hope my kind stars may give me another such walk as I have enjoyed with you."

He raised his hat with a gesture of profound respect, and left the little woman in a flutter of

self-consciousness, and a little doubt of the propriety of her conduct.

"I am sure it was a mercy he didn't want to come in. I wonder what Helena would say. Those young things never think that any one can be admired but themselves. It was good-natured to give me her bootlace. I must go out and buy a pair, and pay her back. Miss Helena, my dear, I have found my purse, and I am just going out to buy a new bootlace."

"Pray do not take that trouble. I have nearly a dozen new ones. You see," she said, smiling, "it was nothing of a gift."

"Ah! but it came in the nick of time, and that was everything."

CHAPTER XVII.

"But who can see the ripening rose,
Nor seek to wear it?"

Captain Thornycroft was determined not to let any chance escape of cultivating a closer acquaintance with Mrs. Rosemary, but he scarcely knew how to proceed. "Who would have thought," he said to himself, "that such a young fool as Sir Atheline, whose mind I could span, as I believed, should have so tricked and deceived, and—hang it! laughed at me! as no doubt he does—engaged!—and I do not know it! I talked of my unknown beauty, and said she was handsomer than Mrs. Fairlight,—he assented,—I was startled at that, and he turned it off artfully. Ned Thornycroft diddled by a child. Such a beautiful young woman. I dare say she is rich. Lord Gower's ward, very likely his heiress. I should like to see her without her hat. Such

a throat she has! 'Nothing venture, nothing have!' I will call in a day or two on Mrs. Rosemary."

In the mean time Sir Atheline thought more of Mrs. Fairlight than of Helena. This is not unnatural. Helena was already his own, at least, so long as he did not too evidently "kick over the traces." Mrs. Fairlight had irritated his vanity by her gaiety and playfulness of manner at the Duchess of Doncaster's. "She has no real feeling" had been his angry thought; then, for he had an idea both of justice and of the ridiculous aspect of things. "What could I have expected?—that she should have carried about the beautiful look of pity which came over her face when she accidentally caused me pain—that she should have had a pensive grace, and forsworn laughter, because she had shaken hands with a new acquaintance in the morning, probably from a feeling that she owed him a kindness, because she had hurt his wounded arm? What an ass I am!"

Ass or not, Sir Atheline was determined to add to the treasures of Mrs Fairlight's boudoir,

by the presentation of a biscuit figure to that lady, which should be of spiral shape to make the apex of her favourite group. The ten pounds which Helena had been too modest to take from him for the claims of charity was now to be expended, with an added amount, in showering gifts where wealth had already done its utmost to produce excess.

Sir Atheline went to the best shop at the West End, and selected four slender, upright figures. Then he had them packed and placed in his cabinet, and drove with them to Mrs. Fairlight's residence. He arrived at the moment when "Sleepless lovers just at twelve awake," and writing with his pencil on a card, he gave it to the footman to carry to his mistress.

"Sir Atheline Vernon has ventured to bring some biscuit figures, and will feel honoured by Mrs. Fairlight's acceptance of any which she may select, as being most in accordance with those already in her boudoir."

The footman disappeared, and after some little delay he returned with Mrs. Fairlight's compliments, and if Sir Atheline Vernon would wait

half-an-hour she would join him in the drawing-room.

Sir Atheline employed the half-hour in unpacking his purchases, aided by the footman, and when each delicate work of art had been freed from its residue of sawdust, he replaced them in their box, and himself carried it to the lady's boudoir.

There were no indications of Mrs. Fairlight's occupations; she had not been there that morning evidently. There was a vase of hot-house cut flowers in the centre of a round table, and at equal distances the housemaid had arranged all the richly-bound volumes of the brightest colours —purple, orange, crimson, blue and green, with their arabesque patterns in gold, with such regard to size and precision that they resembled the pattern of a table-cover.

The fire burnt brightly, reflected in the sides of the polished stove and burnished fender, but no ashes had yet fallen. The housemaid had evidently not long left the scene of her labours.

There were the biscuit figures as they had

been placed by Captain Thornycroft and himself. There was the cabinet, of which the restive drawer had occasioned the slight accident which had made on him an impression so vivid. He stood contemplating the statuettes, and trying to imagine how they would suit the groups already placed, when he fancied he would try with one of the four he had brought.

He took out the first, and stood it carefully on its pedestal, placing it on the cabinet between the Italian peasant, that mortal mother, and the goddess of Greece. He stood back and looked at it; and thus employed he heard not the steps of Claudine on the thickly-piled carpet, till a soft voice at his side utter the word, "Beautiful!"

Sir Atheline turned suddenly, and seeing the sweet face of Claudine, involuntarily echoed her exclamation; but he looked at her so intently that she flushed over cheek, throat, and brow. Sir Atheline coloured also, and began to apologise for his early visit. "You see," he said, "I could not be sure if I came later of not finding you surrounded by a crowd of people who would distract your attention from the statuettes,

and I wanted you to select one for this place. This is, as you perceive, Cassandra, from Romney's celebrated picture of which Lady Hamilton was the model; the sacrificial axe raised above her head with one arm, while the other hand tears from her brow the laurel-leaf sacred to the god whom she had defrauded. The face seems to me, even at this distance of time, to possess a living beauty in which we believe, and which we worship, whilst the representations of Mary Queen of Scots seem homely and heavy by comparison."

"Yes, that is true," agreed Claudine. "Here is a fine engraving of her from a painting by Zucchero, when she was wedded to the dauphin. It gives the notion of being a correct portrait, because the dress is well and carefully executed, yet how unattractive!"

"This is indeed a fine engraving"—(a collection of engravings was one of Atheline's extravagances)—"but in what strange company you have placed it—scraps from newspapers, caricatures, autographs."

"Yes," said Claudine, "I find that ill-con-

cocted book, at least according to your ideas, is more sought for and lingered over by my guests than any of those better arranged. Variety has ever the greatest power of attracting men and women. *Toujours perdrix* is fatal to happiness."

"Then you do not approve of marriage?" said Sir Atheline, thinking with a pang of Helena.

"That is as it may be," returned his companion, laughing lightly. "I would not be without my own chains. They are so light; and if they are not of roses, they produce beds of them whereon to repose. But, then, I am so happily circumstanced, with the most complaisant husband in the world, who gives me all the ingredients for enjoyment, and does not interfere with it."

"Then," said Sir Atheline, "you say to Mr. Fairlight, as did Diogenes to Alexander, 'Stand out of my sunshine!'"

"You are very ungallant to compare me to an old crabbed cynic living in a tub."

He turned and smiled only in reply, but the look and the smile were eloquent. As she

spoke, her companion turned over the engraving of the Queen of Scots, and was arrested by Tennyson's "Charge of the Six Hundred." His eyes flashed, and his cheeks reddened, and his breath came quickly, partly at the remembrance of that glorious charge and partly in admiration of the verses that recorded it.

"There! I told you how attractive was the variety of the book. That is the first copy, and I hate the alterations he made afterwards," said Claudine.

"Yes; I quite agree with you. The faulty rhymes are better from the rush and fire of the lines. But will you permit me to show you another statuette?"

He removed Cassandra, and placed on the cabinet, Diana, draping herself.

"That is very beautiful also," said Claudine.

"Here is another, and yet another," Atheline said, putting the rest on the table, and watching the countenance of Claudine, as she caught sight of them. One was a laughing nymph crowned with snowdrops, an impersonation of Spring; the other was Nydia, carrying on her head a basket

of flowers, which one arm supported, whilst the other was outstretched in the uncertain, tentative movement of blindness.

There was something of sadness in the very slight contraction and elevation of the eyelids towards the nose, which might tell of unhappy love, or of the steady regret of deprivation of sight.

Mrs. Fairlight, who had looked with comparative indifference at the quiet majesty of Diana, and at the passion of grief and of prophetic terror of Cassandra, now felt the quick moisture springing to her eyes. The look of the blind girl

"Disturbed her soul with pity."

And she turned away with the innocent shame of having shown more sensibility than the occasion demanded.

Sir Atheline only thought her very charming and full of feeling. Then she turned towards him with eyes shining with tears but smiling lips—a look that said, "Laugh at me if you will; I defy your derision." But Sir Atheline was not thinking of derision. He envied the quick sensibility which he had outgrown.

"'Pity, and smiles, and tears which I have not,'" he said.

"Whose line is that?" asked Claudine: "Byron's?"

"You do not know the passage?" said Sir Atheline, with a feeling of relief.

"No."

"It is best so," he said with a sad smile.

Claudine's curiosity was aroused, and she determined to find out if possible.

The servant coming up announced luncheon.

"Will you not come and have some?" the lady asked her guest. "But first shall we decide on the statuette?"

The Cassandra stood on the post of honour. Claudine sprang upon the chair to have a closer inspection, and thought the face far more beautiful than when seen from below. When the head is thrown back the face is less handsome when seen in front than in profile. The pair forgot all about luncheon, and Sir Atheline removed Cassandra and substituted Nydia.

"Yes, I prefer that to either of the others."

"Cannot you find places for the other three?"

asked Sir Atheline. "You could not condemn me to take them away again?"

"I shall be very glad to keep them," Claudine said simply. Money was no object to her, and she supposed it was of no consequence to the young baronet, who was accredited with having succeeded to a fine unencumbered estate.

"I will have three brackets put up at once, and when you come again you shall place them as you think best," she said, smiling. She was standing on the chair, and, looking up at her as the misty light streamed on her figure, Sir Atheline observed, as he held out his hand for her to descend, "You remind me of the statue mentioned in one of Scott's novels—

'Softly painted in the morning radiance.'"

"Yes, in 'Anne of Geierstein,' I think. The Count who is given to astrology, and is promised an instructor—and finds——"

"His fate," said Sir Atheline.

She sprang off the chair, scarcely touching his outstretched hand.

"Now come to the dining-room."

"Not to-day; I have stayed an unconscionable time."

"It has not seemed so to me," said Claudine simply, for being in earnest she ceased to be coquettish.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"O love, young love,
Let saint and cynic prattle as they will,
One hour of thee is worth an age of ill."

So he left her, with a feeling of troubled pleasure; and with her was the pleasure untroubled—for she thought not of consequences, and loved for the first time, and for the first time believed herself to be beloved.

Probably the hours that followed were the happiest of Claudine's life—she felt as if she trod in air—everything was more beautiful in her eyes. Her love for Sir Atheline made her tender to all the world. Claudine, though married, had not a single feeling of remorse—she meant no harm—she would never commit an indiscretion—she might worship the beautiful image he had left impressed on her mind; but no one should be conscious of her devotion.

What did he mean by the line he desired her not to know—

"Pity and smiles and tears which I had not."

How could she find out the succeeding line? She consulted the seventeenth volume of Murray's last edition of Lord Byron, and found the passage in "Manfred"—

"Pity and smiles and tears which I had not,
And tenderness—but that I had for her."

She flushed crimson over cheek and brow and bosom. "He loves me," she said, "and wished that I should not know it."

Then she began to speculate—"When will he call again?" She would drive in the Park after luncheon; perhaps she might catch a glimpse of him there. With a face flushed yet softened in expression by sensibility, she looked at herself in the glass. She was glad that she was beautiful for Sir Atheline's sake. She should be eager to see him again, and observe if there was a speaking consciousness in his eyes of the secret she felt was between them.

Sir Atheline, though not married, was en-

gaged, and was overwhelmed with shame at his lapse from constancy. He had a great admiration of Helena, and thought her very perfect. She was his affianced wife, and he, though extravagant and reckless, had no intention of behaving like a scoundrel. It was a pang to think that he must avoid Claudine in future, and he added, in wonder at his infatuation, "I have seen her but thrice, and spoken to her but twice—I will spend an hour with Helena this afternoon. I wish that vulgar woman was not there. It seems a desecration of Helena that she should have such surroundings."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Friendship balmy words may feign,
Some are e'en more false than they.
Oh! 'tis only music's strain
Can sweetly soothe and not betray."

Sir Atheline called on Helena, and advanced with what Leigh Hunt called "an affectation of a bright-eyed ease." He was conscious of very wavering constancy in his feelings towards Helena; but he had entirely forgotten how ill-tempered he had been on his previous visit, and Helena was too kind and too wise to remind him.

Mrs. Rosemary was sitting in the back drawing-room with a large workbasket of linen before her; she rose and went into the reception room to speak to Sir Atheline, and then returned to give her attention to garments unfit for profane eyes. Thus Helena and her affianced were left

undisturbed otherwise than by a glimpse of the ample shoulders of the sempstress.

"I am so glad you are come, Atheline," said Helena, in whom there was no smile. "Petrarch is very well, but one gets rather weary of all work and no play."

"That is true," acquiesced Sir Atheline, profoundly.

"I don't suppose you know much about it," retorted Helena, smiling. "For an instance, what studies have engaged you this morning?" She was rather sceptical of his speaking from experience.

"Oh, this morning!" said the unblushing youth. "I have been down in the City, inspecting musty title-deeds."

"You are not really thinking of selling the old place?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it—not a foot, not an inch, nor the eighth part of an inch," replied Atheline, who seemed to invent from a feeling of lightheartedness. "The fact is, that the lawyer says there is a little nook of land which cuts into my estate—shall I say *our* estate?—and

the landlord is willing to sell; but, as is usual on such occasions, the price he asks is exorbitant."

"What does Mr. Pincent advise?"

"Oh, to wait and beat him down; but I am sick of dry subjects! Will you not give me a little music, Helena?"

"Yes, certainly; what will you have?"

"Oh, some songs. Have you not got your music?"

"Yes—some—but——"

"Where are my mother's songs?"

"I have them in my memory, but of course they are at Marshmere."

"You don't seem to have any duets," said Sir Atheline, discontentedly.

"No," replied Helena, gently; "one cannot sing duets by oneself, and I do not think Mrs. Rosemary is musical;" and she smiled. "But if you are content with old music, we shall find plenty in this canterbury."

She took up a volume, and turning over the leaves, yellowed by time, she came on several familiarised to her by the voice of Lady

Vernon. Sir Atheline began to sing Moore's words to the "Rose-tree in full bearing"—

"I'd mourn the hopes that leave me,
If thy smile had left me too."

He sang in a rich baritone voice, with such exquisite tenderness, that Helena's eyes filled with tears.

"I do not think any one could be false to you, Atheline, if you sang to them like that."

"You goose! It is not every one who has your sensibility to music"—and he wondered if Claudine possessed it.

He took up another volume, and opened at "La Favorita," and turning the leaves over, told Helena to play it. "The last time I sang this song, Benedict played the accompaniment—so mind your P's and Q's."

"It is very easy," she said.

And Sir Atheline began, "Ange si pur!" and sang it with all the expression and cultivation of the professional who had taught him, and with more than his master's freshness of voice.

Alas! no amount of study can ever give back that exquisite tone which youth alone bestows.

Helena felt this charm when Sir Atheline sang one of Mrs. Arkwright's simple melodies, "Give me thy heart." In the second verse, when he came to—

> "Then say that glory you adore,
> My valour shall attain it;
> Or if you value learning more,
> I'll struggle hard to gain it.
> No danger shall my heart appal,
> No toil—if you desire it—
> I'll give the hardest proof of all,
> Absence, if you require it—"

which Sir Atheline sang with intense expression, Helena thought that his efforts in learning to please her had been of the weakest kind, and so far from desiring his absence, she only wished she could see a little more of him. He in singing had felt and thought of Mrs. Fairlight, and of the determination he had formed never to see her again.

Of course, he could not call on Helena to applaud this resolution, who knew nothing of the wanderings of his volatile love. He meant to marry Helena—it was the right thing to do—but he felt that if he saw much of Claudine he should find that the right thing required too

great an effort; but *he must* marry her—she had but £1000, poor girl! and he looked at her with a plaintive pity, which she luckily took for its kin—love.

"It is strange that he does not ask me if I can sing," she said to herself. "He only stops at the solos in turning the leaves." She did not know that when people say they are "devoted to music," it means that they are only devoted to their own performance of it.

At length she said, carelessly, "Can you sing this?"—stopping at the fine duet between Semiramide and Assur.

"Yes," he replied, with something of wonder; "but I cannot sing both parts."

"Then," said Helena, "take the part of Assur, and I will be Semiramide," and Atheline was breathless with wonder at the power and cultivation of her voice. He was also a little jealous.

"I had no idea you were so finished a performer," he said, with an air rather crest-fallen, when it became his turn to repeat the melody in a lower key, and he sang with more care and with less spirit and sensibility than in the solos.

When the duet was concluded, which, from the youthful quality of both the voices, was a very beautiful performance, Sir Atheline looked at Helena persuasively, and said, "Helena! they are performing that at the Opera at Drury Lane."

Mrs. Rosemary, who had rolled up the secreted stockings, now came to the piano with eyes wide open, and a mouth rounded in astonishment. Helena looked at her with aversion, but was obliged to confess to herself that she was a pretty woman for her age. Time had enlarged and smoothed her skin, which had no room for wrinkles—it seemed too tightly stuffed with white, diversified by blue veins. Her hair, too, was beautiful in colour and luxuriant. When quietly dressed, she was a good specimen of a British matron, whom, as a rule, the Frenchmen pronounce to be "beefy."

"Well!" she cried; "Miss Pevensy, I never heard anything so beautiful in my life! And your voice with Sir Atheline's! Dear me! I wish I knew the story of it."

"I will bring you the libretto," said Sir Atheline, good naturedly.

"I am sure you are very kind, sir. I wish all young folks were so considerate—but I won't trouble you."

"No trouble," Sir Atheline assured her.

"Well, Sir Atheline, if 'tis a book a modest woman may read—but, from the name of it, I feared it might be a little too free."

Sir Atheline's look of astonishment now surpassed that of Mrs. Rosemary.

"Ah! you thought I did not know any language but my own! I picked up a word or two of Latin from my dear departed saint, and I know that *liber* is free, and *ette* and *etto*, and that means little. So, when you told me the book about the song was called *libretto*, I knew what to expect—but I am one that holds to this, that a married woman should read everything. If not, how should she know what is good and what is bad? I'll lock it up, so *she* sha'n't see it," she added, smiling and nodding at Helena.

Sir Atheline bowed, and went on with his interrupted speech.

"Helena, I should very much like to take you

and Mrs. Rosemary to the Opera. There you will hear that duet in perfection. I think you would sing it much better if you observed how certain graces are managed by Signora ——, and you could get the proper pronunciation."

"I think," said Helena, timidly—for she did not conceive it possible that Sir Atheline should be jealous of her singing—he a man and her lover—"I think the pronunciation is correct. My Italian music master, Signor ——, told me he was more than satisfied with it; but I daresay I might learn more from hearing the perfection of a female voice on the stage."

Sir Atheline looked blank. He had made a fool of himself in saying her pronunciation was not good, because she had said she did not know the language, and had not studied it because she was afraid she should lack the proper delicacy of sound. He had forgotten she had been taught to enunciate properly the words of the songs she had learnt with her master.

"You will come with me then? Let me get a box for you."

Helena had never seen, or rather she had never heard an opera. She was piqued by Sir Atheline's criticisms on her pronunciation, and longed to judge herself whether she had strayed from the delicate demarcations of sound which should be reproduced in attempting a foreign language; but she said simply,—

"No, I thank you. We will defer it for some months."

"You talk like a child," said the young man, irritably. "This is Signora ——'s last season: you will never hear her if it be deferred."

Helena was silent. She did not like to refer to her mourning for his mother, whose death his life seemed to ignore. It would be a reflection on his want of affection. She gave no reason, but continued to refuse; and after a few more useless persuasions on his part, he took his hat and left her.

CHAPTER XX.

"O wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oursels as others see us!"

"My dear Miss Pevensy," began Mrs. Rosemary, arresting Helena as she was escaping from the room. "I can't see a nice young man like that cast away for want of a little good handling —you ain't wise, my dear Miss Helena—

'Use the man that you love like your favourite guitar,
Though there's music in both, they are both apt to jar.'

And if you go to screw up the strings, and keep them screwed up—crack! crack!—they break, and 'tis ten to one if you can use them afterwards, tying is difficult so as to make them hold. I used to play a bit myself, so—bless you!—*I* know."

Helena remained standing in dignified, and

silent indignation, like the stately young cow, in the "Original Poems," which instructed the young in the first ten years of the present century. "Not approving to be thus rebuked by an ass," yet not satisfied with the results of her own line of conduct—she waited for a pause in Mrs. Rosemary's flood of eloquence, and then bowing her head gravely, she left the room.

Mrs. Rosemary also vacated the drawing-room. Lately she had found a more congenial companion than the young lady in Wilmot, who, though she had been a servant, was a person nearly as stately as her young mistress.

Now each had their advantages, which, in their own opinion, made them superior to their associate, and each considered that the other was "better than nothing to speak to."

Lady Vernon had never been in the habit of encouraging conversation in her domestics, and Miss Pevensy had followed in her footsteps.

So Mrs. Wilmot, who treated the housemaid with the same distance of manner, was not sorry

to unbend a little to Mrs. Rosemary—though the lady's maid's association with ladies made her quick-sighted as to that person's deficiencies.

Mrs. Rosemary was a clergyman's widow, and in social status was above Mrs. Wilmot, the middle-aged spinster. Mrs. Wilmot was dark, lean, and angular, and seemed to feel that there was a kind of immorality in the abundance of firm white flesh possessed by her companion, but for all that, Wilmot felt grateful that Mrs. Rosemary had made no effort to take the reins of government from her hands in the money management, and when that plump personage came down into the housekeeper's room, Wilmot produced a bottle of cherry-brandy and a couple of glasses, and placed Mrs. Rosemary in the easy chair by the fire.

"Yes; a fire is a comfort this shifty weather, though 'tis the month of May," said the matron, drawing her chair close, and putting her feet on the fender, carefully turning back her dress lest the heat should spoil the colour.

"I always keep a little fire in my sitting-room," replied Wilmot.

Mrs. Rosemary thought that from the quantity used, Mrs. Wilmot did not pay for them.

She had tried to find out Helena's fortune by a little finessing at different times, and now put the question direct.

"Miss Pevensy has a large fortune, has she not?"

Wilmot knew that was not the case, but she had no intention of telling the truth.

"I am told to spare nothing by Lord Gower, who is Miss Pevensy's guardian; but you see she is not of age yet, only eighteen, poor dear child! so she can't quite spend as she likes."

Wilmot thought that Mrs. Rosemary might have perceived symptoms of economy in Helena, which might indicate just the reverse of what she, Wilmot, wished to imply.

"She's engaged to Sir Atheline?" interrogatively.

"It was Lady Vernon's dearest wish that the marriage should take place."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Wilmot, I have had experience in such matters. You see, ma'am, you *can't* know, at least, not so fully—and I am

sure you can't know any other way, you are too much of a lady for that—but as sure as my name is Rosemary, that poor young lady knows no more how to manage that young gentleman than I do to drive a four-in-hand. I have heard that he is a lively bird, and there—she will drive him quite off from her with her stiff ways."

"Stiff stays!" cried the lady's maid, who was rather deaf. "She hasn't got a bit of whalebone about her!"

"Not outside," said Mrs. Rosemary, impressively.

Then both women sniffed with anger, Wilmot at the imputation on her young lady, and Mrs. Rosemary, because her suggestion met with no response from her auditor.

She recommenced, however, for she was sick at heart from disappointment.

"Would you believe it?" said she. "Sir Atheline offered to take an opera-box to take us to the Opera, and Miss Helena said no, 'cause she is in mourning—not a bit of a relation—and Sir Atheline asking her to go!"

Wilmot was silent. She knew more of her late mistress's son than had ever come to even Lady Vernon's cognizance. Servants get to naked facts without the verbiage which clothes them for polite society. She agreed in her heart with Mrs. Rosemary, but she could not see how she could suggest anything to Helena, who, though she liked her, Mrs. Wilmot felt pretty certain, kept her at so great a distance.

"If she's engaged," said the matron, "she had better marry him at once, though of course I should lose by that—all the same—the house is draughty. If she is not conformable to him and keeps herself so aloof from all his amusement, she may go and mope by herself. Young men are but children, and when did you ever see a child go and stand by another that is moping in a corner when the rest of the party are at high jinks?"

There was no answer to this, and Mrs. Rosemary tossed off a glass of cherry-brandy and paused, looking wistfully at the bottle.

"She never can want another glass!" thought Wilmot.

Then Mrs. Rosemary said in louder voice—for she found her companion to be rather deaf—

"Why don't that young man come in in the evenings, when Miss Pevensy is so dull that she has always tears in her eyes? What is he doing with himself? I dare swear he is about to all the queer places in London just because his young woman don't go with him to the proper ones—she *ought* to have said 'yes' when he asked her to the Opera."

Talk of the god Pan, and the proverb says you will see his horns.

The words above were just uttered under the treacherous influence of the genial glass, when, as both women had their feet on the fender and their elbows on their knees, and their chins on their palms, the voice of Helena was heard close to them, and she said—

"Wilmot, I rang for you three times!"

Then she turned and re-ascended the stairs, leaving both women feeling very silly and crest-fallen.

They looked at each other.

"Who would have thought she had been so near?" said Wilmot.

"I heard a bell ring three times," said Mrs. Rosemary; "but you are deaf, ma'am, so I ought to have spoken, but I never thought it could have been for you."

Then they looked again at each other in silence, and said at length:

"How much do you think she *could* have heard?"

We have all said such things in our time.

"Oh, not much," said Mrs. Rosemary in a comforting way. "I was saying she ought to go with Sir Atheline to the Opera—and listeners never hear any good of themselves."

"Miss Pevensy never condescended to be a listener," replied Wilmot.

"Well, Mrs. Wilmot, but had you not better go?—as she said she had rung three times, she probably wanted you."

Mrs. Wilmot gave a look of agony at the bottle. She was afraid Mrs. Rosemary would take another glass if she left her alone. She was afraid of showing her fears, and of insulting

her guest if she locked it up in her presence; but an irritated pull at the upstairs bell-rope cut short her hesitation—she flew upstairs, and Mrs. Rosemary remained master of the field, and of the cherry-brandy.

The two women were mistaken in thinking that Helena had heard but little of the conversation. Human nature is human nature still, whether in a lady or a lady's maid. She had caught her name accidentally as she descended the stairs, having, with the overwrought imagination of the young, fancied from the neglect of the bell that Wilmot had died as suddenly as her dear Lady Vernon had done. When she heard her voice talking comfortably to Mrs. Rosemary, Helena was a little ashamed of her fears; but when she heard her conduct arraigned by that vile companion chosen for her for her sins, by Lord Gower, and Wilmot offering a defence so slight, that she might as well have been silent, her irritation was about to boil over to the detriment of her dignity. She trembled with angry agitation, and after she had relieved herself in some degree by her stately

reproof, she returned to the drawing-room, awaiting Wilmot's presence, intending to reprove her. When she did not appear immediately she was still more angry. What! had not her companion and her lady's maid finished their mutual complaints of her conduct?

The bell-rope suffered even more this time; but when Wilmot appeared with a very wan face, Helena determined to ignore the fact that she had overheard the discussion, thinking of the proverb, which she felt sure would suggest itself to each woman. So, still with great dignity she directed Wilmot to sew in new collars and cuffs to her black dress, and dismissed her, retiring into her own room to think over the criticism passed on herself and her lover.

When Sir Atheline left Helena, he rushed away in an irritated state of mind. It was a foolish feeling, and he would not have admitted it to himself, but he had always been admired for the beautiful quality of his voice and his exquisite taste in singing, and now Helena sang much better.

He felt convinced that of all girls under the sun Helena was most priggish and conceited.

"What nonsense not to have come to the Opera with me! as if my mother would have objected to my amusing myself."

That train of thought was deviated from at once. He knew that many of his amusements would have brought down on him his mother's condemnation.

"Yes," he argued, "going to the Opera with the girl whom she would have picked out of all the world for him to marry, would have met not only with her consent but approbation—and young women are so ignorant of the world! I dare say my father sold wild oats when he was a bachelor. I am no worse than my neighbours. I'll do my duty, and marry Helena; but I declare it will be more of a duty than a pleasure if she do not unbend a little."

On one subject Sir Atheline had quite made up his mind. He would avoid the temptation of associating himself again with Mrs. Fairlight. Had he seen in that lady the treachery of a coquette, who wished to attract another captive

to dangle in triumph in the face of her envying sex, he would have defied her enchantments; but she was a young impressionable woman, scarcely beyond girlhood, with a total absence of artifice—neglected by her husband, though surrounded by all that his wealth could yield in the way of compensation.

CHAPTER XXI.

"A chase of idle hopes and fears,
Begun in folly closed in tears."

Sir Atheline sauntered into the Park. He should only do as usual in this, he told himself. If he saw Mrs. Fairlight's carriage he need not speak to its occupant. He should be able to observe whether that fellow Thornycroft hung about her.

It was wonderful how very moral Sir Atheline felt when he considered the matter from this standpoint. He had not been long in the ring before he saw Captain Thornycroft talking to some ladies with plain thin faces, which had done their owners service for many seasons, with an old-fashioned carriage and a pair of horses, past their prime.

It was quite as well that it should be so.

Everything was in accordance in the equipage. Sir Atheline felt benevolently towards the captain, and, contemplating his broad shoulders, short reddish hair and decidedly red whiskers, as he leaned forward to speak to the pale ladies, he admitted to himself that Thornycroft was certainly a very fine fellow as to physical qualities, whatever his moral ones might be. At any event, he was doing no harm where he was, and a half thought of wonder, whether Thornycroft would ever marry an heiress, and repay him the hundred he had borrowed, passed through his mind at the sight of the pale women, on whom he seemed to be lavishing his attentions this fine afternoon in May, with so many lovely girls in the Park.

Alas! let no one think himself in security. Captain Thornycroft, having fallen into a trap, laid by Miss Keturah's lips and eyes, was only too glad to escape himself and put Sir Atheline in his place, by assenting to the lady's entreaties.

"Now really, Captain Thornycroft, if that is Sir Atheline Vernon you must introduce him

to me. His mother and mine were bosom friends; he *must* have heard Lady Vernon speak of it."

"Here, Vernon, come and let me introduce you to Miss Kate—" ("Keturah," simpered the lady) "to Miss Keturah Lyster."

"Very much honoured," said and bowed Sir Atheline, not in the best of tempers.

"I will not interfere with your happiness," said the captain, walking off.

"Oh, Sir Atheline!" exclaimed Miss Keturah, I have been *so* anxious to make your acquaintance."

"Don't be such a giddy girl," said her sister, reprovingly; "Sir Atheline will think you quite forward."

"I am sure I should be ungrateful if I attributed anything but amiability to a speech so flattering," said the gentleman.

"Ah! but the reason—you see we ought to be well acquainted. My mother, Mrs. Lyster, was so devoted to Lady Vernon, and they had a bond of union in their attachment to that sweet girl, Miss Pevensy."

"Indeed," cried Sir Atheline, to whom this was all news.

"Oh, yes. And the first home the poor young lady fled to on the dreadful loss she sustained was ours. She knew we should welcome her with tenderness. Indeed, Lord Gower himself deposited her in our arms, as it were, before he went abroad."

"Do you know when your uncle returns?" asked Miss Lyster, with an eye to her own interests.

"No," replied Sir Atheline. "I have observed in my experience of life that uncles and nephews are not generally apt to confide their movements to each other. Lord Gower," he continued, "has a large amount of wealth, and few expenses. He would be a wonderfully good husband I should imagine;" and Sir Atheline looked smilingly at Miss Lyster, who coloured, thinking the motive of her question was suspected; whereas Sir Atheline was not thinking of her, but holding himself with a simulated earnestness, in speaking and looking at Miss Lyster, that he might give no sign of consciousness

that Mrs. Fairlight's carriage was passing that of Mrs. Lyster.

He knew not how he was aware of Claudine's proximity. His brain whirled too much to know whether eye or ear brought the consciousness of her presence. He was true to his resolution not to give any sign of intelligence.

The carriage rolled on. Miss Keturah had bowed and kissed her hand, when her elder sister, "bustling up with unsuccessful speed," saw the glimpse of the vanishing vehicle, and cried, "Oh, Keturah, that is Mrs. Fairlight's carriage! Did you see her?"

"Yes."

"And how was she looking?"

"Oh, lovelier than ever, I think. She has a transparent bonnet of pink gauze, and it throws such a charming glow over her skin one might have thought she was blushing."

"You don't know Mrs. Fairlight, I believe, Sir Atheline? I have not met you at any of her receptions."

"No," replied the young man, "I have not had the honour of an invitation."

"Oh, mamma can procure you a card. We are on the most intimate terms with Claudine," added the lady, who would not have dared to use the Christian name in the presence of the person so designated.

Sir Atheline, who was weary of his position, referred to an engagement, and bowing hastily, was enabled to disengage himself of his new acquaintances.

During the hour that passed, Sir Atheline never seemed to see Claudine, yet never for an instant was she absent from his thoughts.

She had constant attendants by the side of her carriage. The Duke of Doncaster, who had thought her so charming at the evening party, found her even more beautiful in the pink gauze bonnet in open daylight. She was too young, and her face was too much indebted to nature alone for its white and red, to care for the afternoon sun.

But the man who most excited Sir Atheline's rage was Captain Thornycroft. He seemed determined to be on one side of Mrs. Fairlight's carriage, whosoever might occupy the other. Once

he turned and looked at Sir Atheline, and then, saying something to Claudine, he laughed.

This filled Sir Atheline with intolerable rage. He could not see Mrs. Fairlight's face, but he felt as if that scoundrel Thornycroft was turning him into ridicule to Claudine. He turned away, and determined to leave the park; but ten minutes later he was talking to a lady who had a pretty daughter just introduced.

Sir Atheline did his best to be agreeable, for Claudine was again passing on the opposite side. He was conscious that the tone of her voice in speaking to one of her attendant admirers was less lively than it had been before she perceived the young beauty who seemed to occupy his attention. Then all swept on again—"a circle that ever returns again to the self-same spot," as the poet says—and once more in the crowd their eyes met, full of mutual reproach, but there was no greeting. The hearts of each beat hurriedly for the instant, and then Claudine returned home pensively, and Sir Atheline went to his club for a brandy-and-soda, which he did not want, and only drank from idleness.

"He loves me, and is jealous," said Claudine to herself. Sir Atheline had quoted—

> "Pity and smiles and tears which I had not,
> And tenderness—but that I had for her,"

she repeated to herself.

In the evening she went to the Opera, to which Sir Atheline had offered to attend Helena and Mrs. Rosemary.

"Perhaps he may come, and, seeing me, may come into my box."

She dressed herself with more than usual care, and went, because she was nervous and impatient, before the overture was over. She had thought of offering to take Miss Keturah Lyster, but her box was generally so crammed that she did not choose to keep Sir Atheline away by a voluntary incumbrance.

Men came and went. They found the Divinity pre-occupied, and though quite as lovely, more silent than usual, not to say depressed. Her eyes wandered round the Opera House seemingly in vain.

At length Captain Thornycroft entered the

box, and Claudine looked up at him eagerly, and then glanced behind him. Captain Thornycroft caught the look, and wondered for whom the lady's eyes were seeking.

After a nod of recognition, Claudine raised her hand, as if to enforce silence, that she might enjoy the magnificent duet between Semiramide and Assur. She wanted the pause to swallow down her disappointment; for when the door opened, she had expected Atheline.

At length the act closed, and she stood up; when looking past her to the opposite side of the house, Captain Thornycroft said,—

"Oh, there is Vernon, with the Baskervilles. I suppose he dined there to-day. I heard Lady Baskerville pressing him. That is the good luck that awaits a man who has come into his kingdom. Now I have a very fine property, only it is in the clouds."

"Yes," said Claudine, smiling, "your fine estate is vested in an uncle of middle age, is it not so? And there are possibilities that he may have a nearer tie."

Captain Thornycroft looked annoyed.

"He is certain not to marry," he said.

"It may be so; but you cannot expect any vigilant matron to count on such expectations as a marriage portion for a daughter."

"Just so," said the other. "Vernon is a bird-in-hand, and the poor unconscious victim seems to chirrup as sweetly as if he were only in the bush, and not nearly caged as he seems to be. Heavens! how he bends his eyes on that bright-looking girl!"

Claudine looked, and turned away not to see it.

"It is of no use though; he is such a butterfly. The truth is, I hear that he is in reality very much attached to his uncle's ward, a very beautiful girl, a Miss Pevensy. She is living in Lady Chilcot's house, in Park Street, with a companion."

"Indeed," said Claudine, in a voice of compelled indifference.

"I wonder if she cares for him," said Captain Thornycroft. He had not suspected that Sir Atheline had spent the morning with Mrs. Fairlight.

After this, Captain Thornycroft, who had been trying with mental pin-pricks to discover where the victim suffered, like the witch-finders of former days with actual ones, was tired of his amusement, for Claudine did not wince openly. Women have a wonderful tact in discovering when love is real, when words have the true ring, when looks gleam the true light. Appearances were against Sir Atheline, but Claudine was convinced that he loved her.

Presently the music recommenced, and Claudine looked across to where Lady Baskerville had retired to the back of the box to allow the two young people the best view. Sir Atheline looked at the fresh fair young beauty at his side, with her large projecting blue eyes and expressionless face, and contrasting it with the regular contour of Helena, and the indescribable attraction of Claudine, he thought his companion looked like a composition doll. He smiled at her good-naturedly as she looked up at him, for Sir Atheline was sweet-tempered when not irritated by opposition; and the mother behind looked with placid delight at the young profiles turned

towards each other, and fancied that Sir Atheline was already more than half won.

"He will join me before the end of the opera," Claudine told herself; and her heart gave a big bound when she saw him rise and leave the box, and she held her breath when footsteps approached the closed door of her box; but they passed on.

Sir Atheline kept to his resolution not to seek Claudine, though he could not tear himself away from her neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Seek not, ye lovers, time to kill
By chess, where queens decide the fray;
For whilst the victor shows her skill,
The loser's love may ooze away."

"I SUPPOSE I ought to go and see Helena to-day," said Sir Atheline to himself, with a sigh. He was conscious of so strong a feeling of distaste to this act of duty, that he reasoned whether he should not leave town for a short time, and see if he could feel better on his return.

Should he travel? He was so social in his habits, that to go companionless abroad seemed to him too dreary to be contemplated. Thornycroft would not leave town till the season was over—and how could he leave Thornycroft dancing attendance on Claudine? No doubt Thornycroft was a very good fellow amongst men, but his ideas of women were anything but

chivalrous. He thought Claudine preferred himself; but in his absence, supposing he left the field clear for the machinations of the Captain, what might not be the result?

"What a scoundrel a man is who, having a wife so attractive, does not mount guard on her himself!" cried Sir Atheline, in his perplexity. And with a droll confusion of ideas, he felt that it was *his* duty to watch over Claudine to save her from the dangers by which she was surrounded. Pussy watching the entrance to the mouse's retreat no doubt considers it her duty to keep off rival tom-cats.

Sir Atheline went dutifully to visit Helena. She had been so much wrought on by the strictures on her conduct made by the two elder women when they were unaware of her proximity, that when her lover called next she had made up her mind that should he ask her again to accompany him to the Opera, she would allow herself to be persuaded to assent to his proposal. He was very sweet in his manner, and sought to please her by inquiring after *her* pensioners, as he persisted in calling them. She could tell him

nothing about their gratitude, for she had not Sir Atheline's cheerful talent of invention. The recipients could not read, and probably had signed the order with X's only; and so far from being grateful, Helena, with her strong good sense and experience of the poor, suspected that indignation for the interruption of the bounty would have neutralised all gratitude for its renewal.

Then, by a little feminine artifice, Helena took him to the piano, and turning over the music of the Semiramide, she asked him to sing the duet with her again.

He assented, with polite indifference; and when the piece concluded, he made only the observation that Helena was in good voice that morning.

She asked if he had witnessed the representation on the previous evening, and if Signora —— had been as brilliant as usual in her vocalisation.

"Yes; she had even surpassed herself," Sir Atheline said.

Then Helena sighed, and said she wished she could hear her; and Atheline replied, "Yes; it

was unfortunate that circumstances had prevented her having that pleasure."

In truth, when calm reflection had settled down on the mind of Sir Atheline, he was overwhelmed with gratitude to Helena for her refusal to allow him to attend her and Mrs. Rosemary to the opera.

Of Helena—so brilliant in tint, so perfect in face and form, so faultless in manner—any man would be proud; but that lump of simpering and trenchant vulgarity, Mrs. Rosemary, how endless would be the sarcasm launched at him for this queer importation into polite society. He should never have heard the last of it. If Helena had changed her mind, he could not help it. He would not give her another chance. It was shameful in Lord Gower to have placed such a person with a girl so refined as Miss Pevensy. With the recklessness of reproach with which we assail the absent, he said to himself that Lord Gower was an old ass to make such a selection, not considering that respectable and refined ladies cannot be picked up at a venture any fine morning to leave their houses to

attend on errant young ladies. When Wilmot had said that Helena was miserable under the care of Mrs. Lyster, Lord Gower thought himself lucky in securing the services of the widow of a clergyman who had been under obligations to himself. She was a lady from position, and as he had never been in her company, he could not know that her association with Helena would be so incongruous. Under the unfortunate circumstances of Helena's isolation, he could not have done better, he thought.

So Sir Atheline's visit to Helena concluded without anything except a challenge on her part to a game of chess. An elaborately-carved set were placed under a glass covering, and an inlaid table of different coloured woods formed the chess-board.

"My dear Helena! we cannot play with those gimcrack things. I'll send you a set of Staunton's 'for your own,' as the children say, and we will have a battle when I come next."

"When will that be?" said Helena, with a little quiver of her upper lip.

"To-morrow—without doubt," replied Sir

Atheline, thus compelled to make an appointment.

"I wish she would not try to tie me up so," he said, kicking the rug up in the hall in his hurry to get away.

He ordered a set of Staunton's chessmen when he had left the house, and Helena had a little comfort in seeing them arrive in the evening. He had not forgotten her, then.

On the following day he called as usual, and she said,—

"Here they are, very serviceable and steady; and if we lose our temper, and then lose the game, we may accidentally upset them without material damage to their beauty."

"I really believe, Helena, you would have liked an ivory set. I did not know that you were taken by outside show."

"Did you not?" said Helena. "I fear I am so; but let us have a game with these worthy and somewhat clumsy men. I shall not play my best, being unaccustomed to them."

They sat down. Sir Atheline was a sharp, brilliant player, who led his attack swiftly, and

got Helena's game into confusion before she could recover herself.

She had lost two pieces, and her king was within a move of checkmate, when she drew courage from despair. There was a rook which she might sacrifice—if Sir Atheline took it with his pawn, he would be checkmated—if with his king, she would have made the sacrifice for nothing.

He had grown impatient at the delay of the checkmate, and inconsiderately believing himself certain of the game, took the rook with his pawn.

"Check and checkmate," said Helena, sweetly —with the smallest possible tone of triumph in her voice.

"What! Is it possible? So it is," said Sir Atheline. "A very clever checkmate, really," he said, in a tone of superiority—"shall we have another?"

Helena assenting, replaced the men. This time she knew more of his tactics, and was prepared for his attack. She had the move also which he had won in the first game, and

strengthening her position as she knew herself to be best in defence, she awaited the shock of his advance.

Sir Atheline, disappointed in the result of his first spring, looked vainly for some unwary movement on the part of his adversary; but Helena foresaw and disappointed all his plans. She won a pawn at the beginning of the game, and the pawn won the game ultimately.

Sir Atheline flushed with anger.

"I am unfortunate, this morning," he said. "Somehow I can never steady my brain before the evening."

This was unhappily too true, but neither Helena nor he suspected the cause, which was the intemperance which had already begun its inroads on a frame, which, from his fine form and natural healthfulness, promised a life prolonged to the four-score years allotted to man.

Had Sir Atheline been told that he was committing a slow suicide, he would have laughed the speaker to scorn. In the first place he would not have believed the prophecy—and, had he done so, at twenty-four he would have

considered his future extension of life in the way in which he thought of his fortune—enough left, even if he squandered part of it.

He was irritated by Helena's beating him at chess, and liked her the less for her two victories.

A few days after, when he called on her, he criticised her pronunciation of some English word. He wanted to find fault with something, and he unfortunately attacked one whose education had been as carefully trained as his own, and who had profited more by the tuition. She simply said that she believed she was right, and without more ado, opened a large edition of Johnson, and put her finger on the word—to prove it.

"It will be an infernal thing to marry a woman who is always getting an advantage over one," he said, as he walked away. "She is perfection—but," he continued, quoting,—

"'Perfection is
Insipid in this naughty world of ours.'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"When every tongue thy folly named,
I fled the unwelcome story."

When Sir Atheline reached his club, he found a card for one of Claudine's receptions. His face flushed and his heart beat faster, but he told himself that honour forbade his acceptance of the invitation.

"No," he said. "I love her—oh! how dearly! I never loved till now—but she is the wife of a brute who is unfaithful to, and who neglects her; and I am engaged to a woman whom other men might adore, but whom I can only respect. My mother would approve my abstention from the society of the only woman I care for in the world, and I will abstain."

Helena's hours were lonely ones. She compelled her attention to the study of Italian, and

longed for an Italian master or mistress, but she did not believe that she could have any money to spare for such a purpose. It was sad to be pulled up constantly by that ignorance of the sound of a foreign language, which a native of the country only could set right; but she learned the meaning of her 'Petrarch and Dante' in the best manner she could, and trusted that Sir Atheline would let her have a master after she married.

Her solitude continued; for the society of Mrs. Rosemary had no particular charms, considering that Helena could go out only before any one was stirring, or with her very uncongenial companion, so when the Misses Lyster called, she was sincerely pleased to see them.

"Why, my dear Miss Pevensy," began Miss Keturah, "I declare you look taller and thinner than ever, you really shut yourself up too much."

"I cannot condole with you and your sister on your looks, for you appear remarkably well, and cheerful."

"Yes, pretty well, for that you see we go out a great deal, and see a number of charming

people. My dear, you have had your flowers changed! how sweet and lovely they are! What did you pay?"

"I really do not know," said Helena, with a scared look. "The fact is, I had not observed that they had been altered; flowers were so much a matter of course at Marshmere, and were changed so frequently by the gardener, that I have not thought of them here."

"Ah, I daresay you will have plenty of money when you marry Sir Atheline, so it will not matter. Did he tell you that we had a long talk with him the other day in the park? How very charming he is—you must look sharp, my dear, for we are all pulling caps for him. And even married ladies, but oh fie!"—and she put up her hand and peeped through her fingers at Helena. "I say nothing, but I saw a look—such a look!—exchanged, that expressed a three volumed novel in its intensity."

"But," said Helena, "if the lady were married, there could be no use in 'looking,' because there could be no loving—it would be thrown away."

"My dear, don't be a simpleton. A man who loves a married woman never cares to marry a single one, unless she has a large fortune and he wants to make presents with her money. Then—we watched him at the opera in Lady Baskerville's box. We were in the stalls—can't afford a box. Mrs. Fairlight used to ask one or the other of us formerly, but she has not done so lately. Well! there was Sir Atheline, looking devotion at Miss Baskerville's white shoulders."

"But, perhaps," said Helena, smiling, "it may be with gentlemen as with ladies—

> 'Lothario's treat what fair one could withstand,
> If gentle Damon did not kiss her hand;'

and Sir Atheline may find safety in numbers."

"Well, my dear Helena," said Miss Lyster; "were I you, I would marry him at once. Send for your guardian to tie up your money on yourself, and let us have a nice quiet little wedding—almost private—only just Keturah and myself as bridesmaids. I am sure that poor Lady Vernon, were she alive, would be the first person to advocate it."

Tears rushed into Helena's eyes.

"Yes, *if* she were alive," she answered; "for then I should not be mourning for her death."

The ladies saw that their talk had saddened Helena, and hastened to turn the conversation.

"What do you think we are going to do?"

Helena "could not think," she said.

"But *do* suggest something."

"Give another concert?"

"No, not quite," said Miss Lyster, "but you burn, as children say at hide and seek."

"A ball, then," rejoined Helena. "A ball and something else—a supper!" Helena exclaimed, triumphantly.

"Nonsense, my dear! How gross of you to be thinking of eating and drinking; *we* only think of intellectual enjoyment."

"I am really at a loss," said the girl. "Pity my ignorance of polite life."

"Private theatricals! what do you think of that?" cried both ladies at the same time.

Helena was able to utter only an O-o-oh! which might be interpreted as a tribute to the intellect displayed in the selection of the enter-

tainment, but was really an expression of unmitigated wonder as to what parts the two ladies meant to appear in.

"Yes, my dear Miss Pevensy," said Miss Lyster. "It is for a charity, you know."

"And charity covers a multitude of sins," interpolated Keturah.

"Nonsense, Ket; do let me tell Helena. For the Distressed Needlewomen's Association—nothing could be more deserving"

"And shall you act?"

"Oh! my dear, I do not know—yet, you see there is a committee of ladies, and I must say they are rather cross-grained. Keturah and I would do anything to make ourselves useful."

"But, surely," said Helena, "you do what you please about the filling up the characters, as you give the party?"

"Yes. That is very true," said the elder lady, "but still one has to be conformable to the general wishes."

"Then it is to be a joint-stock party," observed Helena, mercilessly, and Keturah laughed

spitefully, for it was a curious point in her character, that she saw what was weak in her family's armour, and rather enjoyed sending a dart into the crevice.

"No, Miss Pevensy—*we* give the invitations, therefore it is *our* party."

"Is it to be given in your house? I only meant as to whether the size of the rooms was suitable," suggested the young lady meekly.

"Oh! yes, we shall manage. We shall have a raised stage, and all that."

"I hope it will be a successful party," said Helena. "I do not think I care very much about distressed needlewomen, however."

"No! What, not care for your own sex, reduced to such extremity?"

"My dear Lady Vernon used to say, apropos of needlewomen, that they took up the occupation because they think it 'genteel,' and because it gives them unlimited liberty to go out when they please, which is a temptation greater to young women than a box of forbidden sweets to a child. If the distressed needlewomen would go out as domestic servants, they would

be well fed and receive good wages, and then—"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Keturah; "morals be better and the fish no worse; but that would be dependent on their cooking powers."

"However, my dear, if we all had our deserts, who would escape whipping? Let the poor needlewomen be played for," said Miss Lyster.

"And what are you going to act?"

"It is not quite decided on. You see my sister naturally wants to be the heroine, and I am quite willing to take the chambermaid part," said Keturah; "but I do not know what will be settled. We cannot have many performers in a drawing-room. We did think of 'A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.'"

Helena professed her ignorance of the piece.

"Oh, 'tis about Colonel Kirke and a lady who seems to be a wealthy widow, but has a husband concealed—a Jasper Carew—and the interest turns on the difficulty of concealing the husband from the lover."

"I consider myself most fortunate," said Miss Lyster, "in having obtained the promise

of an excellent Jasper Carew and Colonel Kirke. Sir Atheline and Captain Thornycroft came forward most handsomely when they heard we were rather in want of real gentlemen who could be trusted to act with the ladies. I said I was certain that I could never go through my part with a gentleman supposed to be my husband unless I were quite sure of the purity of his principles and the correctness of his conduct."

"Then Sir Atheline is to be the husband, and Captain Thornycroft the villain?"

"Yes. I think they both well represent their characters personally. We want mamma to take Lady Carew, but she does not seem willing; if no one will, we must hire an old woman—I mean an actress."

"Surely you might prevail on some lady to take the part," suggested Helena.

"My dear Miss Pevensy, what young lady would consent to make up old? and what old lady will consent to the confession that she is one? Now, will you not come and see some of the rehearsals at our house?—you see it will not be like coming to a party."

"I fear I must beg you will pardon me. I do not like to go into society when my mourning is so deep."

"Ah, yes, I see—

> 'And bear about the mockery of woe,
> To midnight dances and the public show.'

Well, my dear, good-bye. You had better reconsider this."

"Helena, do help me in this confounded pucker, into which I have brought myself," cried Sir Atheline, who came in as the Lysters left. "The Misses Lyster tell me that you know that I am going to act. When I promised, I had no idea who was to be my bewitching Widow. She knows of my engagement to you; did you tell her?"

"No, certainly not; but she spoke to me as if it were an assured fact, and as I thought she had heard it from you, I did not contradict it. Do you think she means to cut me out of your good graces, Atheline?" continued Helena, smiling.

"She is quite capable of it," responded the youth, with a heavy sigh. "Just look over the

book, Helena, when I go, and tell me what you think of the play."

Helena read through a few scenes, whilst Sir Atheline sat at the piano, picking out with one finger the notes of the German song on the instrument, "I would that my love could silently flow in a single word."

She gave it back, saying that she thought it sad nonsense. "However, it may console you," she continued, "that you have less of it than the Widow and Colonel Kirke. Your part is subordinate, it seems to me."

"Of course, it is the power of a finished actor to make a small part important. I *can* act," said Sir Atheline.

"Under the circumstances," said Helena, "that is fortunate, as you may make much out of a little. You will have to be very tender."

"How can a fellow be tender when his fair one is tough?" asked Sir Atheline. "I wish *you* would act it with me," he added, beseechingly.

"My dear Atheline, what an idea! I should as soon think of riding to the moon on a broom-

stick. I am sure," she was going to say, "Lady Vernon would have disapproved of my acting;" but she altered it into, "I *know* Lord Gower would never consent to allow any lady on whom he had any influence to appear on a stage even in a lady's drawing-room."

"Are you *sure* of that?" cried Sir Atheline.

"Perfectly sure."

"Ah, then I see my way to another widow."

"How?"

"Never mind. You will see the result. Now come and play this accompaniment. You can play it correctly?"

"I do not think I shall break down," said Helena, rather affronted.

So she played, and Sir Atheline sang charmingly, and kept her playing his accompaniments without a thought of asking her to join him in a duet.

"He does not like my voice, I suppose," Helena thought.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Away! thou art not worth the thought
That seeks thee in its own despite;
Thy wavering soul is all untaught
In love's divinity of might."

THE coming theatricals occupied much attention in the circles in which the Lyster family moved, and invitations were so numerously given and so frequently accepted, that the idea of having the representation in the drawing-room of Mrs. Lyster's house was given up, much to that lady's delight, who found that there would be ugly marks in the ceiling and on the walls, where the scenes rested; and provided no added expenses fell on her, she was glad to avoid pulling her house to pieces, as she called it.

So the committee determined to engage St. George's Hall. The amateurs were made rather

nervous by this decision. It seemed all the difference between going into a comfortable swimming bath, of which they could see the boundaries, and plunging into the vast ocean. They became, the ladies especially, very uncertain whether their voices could be heard in a place so spacious. A rehearsal was called, and each actor appeared, book in hand, to read their parts, and try to fit their voices.

St. George's Hall taxed them to the utmost. Miss Lyster, small, lean, and pinched-looking, was only audible by harsh shrieks now and then. She declared that St. George's Hall was detestable, and that anyone might take her part, for she would not act it *there*.

The lady who acted as chief of the committee said she regretted very much Miss Lyster's determination, but the agreement was come to with the proprietor, and there was no escape from it. They could not pay the 40*l*. for nothing.

"I am in despair," said Sir Atheline.

"Ho, perhaps Miss Pevensy would take the part," she said, scoffingly, for she detected that

Atheline's eyes laughed, though his lips were compressed.

"No," said Sir Atheline, quietly. "Miss Pevensy would never act in any theatricals. Lord Gower has so great an objection to what he illiberally calls a personal exhibition, that he declares no woman over whom he has any influence shall ever act."

"That is a clincher," said the youth to himself; for with perceptions quickened by experience, and a disposition brimming over with fun, Sir Atheline had perceived by the questions, however warily put to him by Miss Lyster about Lord Gower, that she had an eye to a futurity in which he was to bear a part.

Lady Baskerville was one of the patronesses of the theatrical arrangement.

"I am sure I would not think of urging Miss Lyster to play the Widow, if she doesn't like the part. We must think of some one else."

"Had we not better give it up altogether?" said Sir Atheline, who was discontented with his part, because Helena had said it was a small one. "You see, if we all subscribe to the dis-

tressed needlewomen, they will not be the worse, and we should avoid great trouble and responsibility."

"You forget, Sir Atheline," said Lady Baskerville, "that we should disappoint a great number of people, and that I have already signed the agreement to use St. George's Hall on the 28th of June. I do not see we can avoid having the performance. I have no doubt I shall be able to find a lady to take the Widow's part. Then we have an excellent Kirke," with a bow to Captain Thornycroft, "a most charming and spirited Kesiah; my nephew has promised to take the part of Kester; my youngest daughter will act the child, and we have only a Dame Carew to seek for and the Widow."

"Perhaps you will take the Dame," said Miss Lyster, spitefully.

"I don't consider myself quite old enough for that, madam," replied the titled matron, with a stiff curtsey.

"I am sure," said Captain Thornycroft, "we may trust to your good management to carry us

over all difficulties; a line at my club will bring me to any place you may appoint for our first rehearsal."

So the party broke up.

A few days after, Sir Atheline received a card for one of Claudine's receptions. He sent a polite refusal, regretting exceedingly that he should be compelled to be in the country on the 30th of June.

Claudine flushed with vexation when she read the response.

Why was he making himself so distant, so disagreeable? had she offended him? was he jealous? She longed to see him again, that she might show by her manner that she did not care for him. But this was impossible if he did not appear. She felt that she had lost dignity by asking him. If she could but recover that false step she might regain tranquillity.

She was in this state of uneasiness when Lady Baskerville called on her to ask if she would take the part of the Widow Carew in the "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing."

Lady Baskerville ran over the persons who

had already consented to act. Claudine hesitated, flushed angrily, and then subsided into her usual manner.

"I think you must excuse me; I do not know the piece."

"Do you object to acting?"

"Oh! by no means, I am fond of it—only I like to be well assured of my actors. I have seen Captain Thornycroft perform, but of Sir Atheline's acting I know nothing; and I think I must decline."

"Pray do not refuse me, my dear Mrs. Fairlight. I am sure I would throw over Sir Atheline if I could get any one better, or whom you would prefer; but he is so young—so very handsome, and is said to be so clever—he is just the person to enlist one's sympathy in Jasper Carew."

Claudine considered how many opportunities she should have for snubbing Sir Atheline in rehearsals if she consented to play.

"I really should prefer not acting," she said; "and I should feel glad if you could procure some one else."

"I do not see how I could replace *you*, my dear Mrs. Fairlight."

And the lady thought of Claudine's faultless toilette and her valuable jewels, the charm of her personal appearance, and the grace of her manner.

"You would not like Miss Baskerville to play the character?"

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Fairlight, she is such a child."

"It is said," observed Claudine, doubtfully, "that Sir Atheline is engaged to a very beautiful young lady—could he not prevail on her to act with him?"

"I really do not know about his engagement. I never saw a man more disengaged in his manner. I fancy it is some rhodomontade of Captain Thornycroft's."

"But time presses. Do *say* you will consent, and let me leave the copy of the book in your hands. Think what worry you will save me and my carriage horses, if you are nice, and say yes. There is a lady of my acquaintance

who is so jealous of you, she will be fit to expire if you make a hit."

"What may be her name?"

"Well, I ought not to say—but it is Mrs. Vandeleur."

"I never saw her in my life to my knowledge, why should she hate me?"

"Why should she?—she is plain and you are beautiful.—There is reason enough."

"Ah! you flatter," said Claudine.

And Lady Baskerville took her leave.

Captain Thornycroft had an interview with this lady after she had left Mrs. Fairlight.

"She has consented to play very unwillingly; it seems that she objects to Sir Atheline Vernon; says that she knows your powers of acting, but seems to think our young friend will know nothing about it. I really do not think she could make a better choice."

"Oh, no, probably not. He must be coached up in the part. I will get Mrs. Lingster, who is the most charming actress I ever saw—she always has acted in the piece—and we shall be

able to manage. Now we want a Kester and a Dame Carew."

He looked hard at the lady, thinking that if she had the needle-women's welfare at heart she would take the character herself, and spare the expense of hiring a professional old woman; but he was too polite to give words to his thoughts.

Soon after he saw Sir Atheline going towards his club, who hailed him with the question—

"How are the theatricals progressing?"

"Oh! have you not heard?—Lady Baskerville has got a Widow, an Anne Carew—at least, she is pretty certain."

"Who may it be—not the youngest Miss Lyster?"

"No; its Mrs. Fairlight—only unfortunately she does not seem to like her husband."

"That is not extraordinary, considering how he treats her."

"Oh! but I don't mean her real but her theatrical one—in truth, she objects to you."

Sir Atheline flushed with anger.

"Pray what may be her objection to me?"

"How can I tell, my good fellow? She says she has never seen you act. Very likely she thinks you look as if you might be a stick."

"Did she say that?"

"Oh, I won't answer for the words. She is not likely to have expressed her opinion so coarsely."

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me what may be her opinion, for I never should consent to take the part."

"My dear fellow, you have consented."

"Then I shall say I have changed my mind. I don't see why I should make an ass of myself to please Lady Baskerville or any one else. The part is a very insignificant one at the best. Jasper Carew is a ridiculous fellow."

"Not if well played. Any part becomes ridiculous when it is performed by a stick of a fellow."

"*You* have a good part."

"Yes, the best next to the woman's; but, my dear Vernon, *I* could not act Carew, such an ugly fellow as I am—you could not do Kirke, you are too handsome. Don't be an ass, and

throw us all out by refusing to play. I will get Mrs. Lingster to attend the first rehearsal, and put us in our places, and all will go smoothly. I would show that conceited woman, were I in your place, that I could act as well as herself, aye, and better too."

CHAPTER XXV.

"I'll give the hardest proof of all,
Absence—if you require it."

Sir Atheline felt so much irritated against Claudine, that he no longer feared being attracted by her. She had said that she considered him a stick of an actor. Then conscience reminded him that she had not used those words; but she had seemingly conveyed that impression to Thornycroft. He did not refuse longer to act Jasper Carew, and took the book to study the part. A day was fixed for the rehearsal of the positions, at the house of Mrs. Fairlight. Claudine, angry at Sir Atheline's refusal to attend her reception, determined to treat him with polite indifference. Sir Atheline was suffering from the irritation of mortified vanity.

Thus they met, with a sufficient number

round them to disguise any awkwardness they might have shown in a smaller party. There was a studied stiffness in the manner of Claudine and of Sir Atheline. Mrs. Lingster looked on the company assembled as a general on his troops, to be placed to the best advantage. With the book in her hand, she read out a few words of each part with the exquisite clearness of tone and perfection of pronunciation which is seldom attained by anyone not trained to the stage from early youth. Mrs. Fairlight observed the graceful carriage and intelligent movement of the finished actress with unconcealed admiration. When the rehearsal of the positions of the play was concluded, Claudine drew the lady aside, and asked her if she would come and see her and give her private instruction till she attained something of the knowledge of her preceptress.

"Oh, certainly," cried the actress. "But it will be better to have Colonel Kirke and Jasper Carew to go through their parts with you."

Captain Thornycroft expressed the greatest delight at the proposition, and Sir Atheline bowed stiffly.

"As your hours are of importance," said Mrs. Fairlight, sweetly, "and we are but idle butterflies on the stream of time, I have no doubt the gentlemen will come here at any period you may appoint, and I will keep myself disengaged to receive you."

"The lessons had better be on the same day," said the actress. "The three, Anne, Jasper, and Kirke, only appear together in the last scene for a few minutes, and then the whole *dramatis personæ* had better rehearse together."

Ultimately it was decided that Mrs. Fairlight and Sir Atheline should rehearse on the following morning from twelve to one o'clock, and Captain Thornycroft and Mrs. Fairlight for another hour after luncheon.

On the next day, therefore, Mrs. Lingster came at the appointed hour, and Sir Atheline a few minutes later.

"She does not resemble me," thought the actress, who was a beautiful blonde, "small, and dark-eyed, but she may do; her face fluctuates so easily."

Mrs. Lingster made this running commentary

as she saw Claudine's face turn pale and then flush as she heard the knock and ring which announced Sir Atheline's advent. She had recovered her self-possession, however, by the time the servant announced him, and rising, bowed, but did not hold out her hand as on the occasion when they had last parted in that room.

The actress went up and shook hands with Sir Atheline, feeling Queen Elizabeth's admiration for a handsome specimen of the male sex. Being a very woman, she made up her mind that the lady and gentleman were either strangers, or had quarrelled after too tender a friendship. That would be unpromising for their acting together, but she would do her best.

The scene opens where Anne Carew is about to release Jasper from confinement—"Come out! my poor, dear prisoner."

Claudine opened the recess, and uttered the words in so unnatural a voice, and so stony a manner, that Mrs. Lingster was in despair. Oh, she will never act, she thought.

"My dear lady," she said remonstrating, "if you addressed your husband to come out with

an invitation so constrained, I should think he would prefer to remain in the closet. He will *never* come out. It should be something in this way," and stealing to unfasten the door noiselessly, lest her impatience should lead to suspicion, she opened the cupboard and said, in a tone of intense pity and tenderness, "Come out, my poor prisoner."

Thus urged, Claudine smiled and imitated her instructress, though with embarrassment which deprived her of her natural grace.

Sir Atheline comported himself with some better imitation of Jasper Carew's foolish flippancy about his place of concealment; but Mrs. Lingster gave up all hope from seeing them act of obtaining even a respectable representation on the stage. Once or twice she thought, being a high-spirited woman, that she would suggest to them to obtain some other instructress; but Mrs. Fairlight was so sweet and winning in her manner, that she found it difficult to find words gracious enough to convey an ungracious intention.

The morning dragged through. After luncheon, Captain Thornycroft was to go through his

scene with Claudine. He arrived, however, before they had left the luncheon-table, and fortified himself with a glass of sherry, to gain courage to court his widow, as he observed.

They adjourned to the drawing-room, and Claudine entered, addressing herself to Kirke, who bowed over her hand and kissed it.

Sir Atheline was conscious that in his acting with Anne Carew he had deserved the imputation she had cast on his acting. He had been really a stick, but he had seen that Claudine had been even more awkward. Now he meant to wait and see how Thornycroft could act.

From the moment of beginning the scene he showed himself a finished actor, and when Anne Carew entered it seemed as if she had been released from a spell of stupidity, which had enthralled her when playing with Jasper Carew; she became at once a playful, intelligent impersonation of the character she represented.

Mrs. Lingster looked on with astonishment. Every phrase was well weighed, every movement told. She found but little to suggest, or amend and what there might be of observation referred

only to the mechanical part. "You must be a little more this way, to allow Colonel Kirke room to turn to the left;" or "You forget to face your audience, that is, Sir Atheline Vernon." At the end of the scene she said, "Very well, indeed. You would both have made your fortunes on the stage. 'Tis sad to think how the talent is rendered useless by your positions and wealth."

Then turning to Sir Atheline, she said, "I really think you might do better with a little practice. Suppose that you and Mrs. Fairlight rehearse a little by yourselves before I come again?"

"I was about to say," said Sir Atheline, "that I wish you would find someone to supply my place. I am utterly unfitted to represent the happy, or unhappy husband, as the case may be."

"Oh! do not give it up," cried Captain Thornycroft.

Claudine did not utter a sound.

"I think it will be best," continued the young man, angrily. "My task is a difficult one for me to play, and Mrs. Fairlight makes it still

harder," he added bitterly, and with hidden meaning.

"Certainly," observed Mrs. Lingster, "Mrs. Fairlight had not got into her swing when she rehearsed with you. I have no doubt you will do better next time. But, good folks, I must be off now, or I shall be late."

"It is time for us to depart also," said Captain Thornycroft, looking back at Sir Atheline as he prepared to attend Mrs. Lingster to her carriage; Sir Atheline, bowing to Claudine, following his companion down a few stairs, and then rushing back, found Claudine standing in the middle of the room, gazing with eyes which seemed fixed by the tears in them on the door whence he had departed.

"Tell me," he said hurriedly, "shall I decline to act with you? Decide for me. I want resolution to act prudently."

"Go,—I will write," she said, inclining her head, and the tears fell on the jewels that decked her folded hands, as Sir Atheline departed.

When Sir Atheline reached the hall, Captain Thornycroft was talking to Mrs. Lingster, with

his hand resting on the carriage door; his friend heard him say, "A regular stick;" and the emphatic voice of the lady echoed the sentiment with, "Can't act a bit; but *she* can."

"Your delightful sex," said the Captain, looking admiration into her eyes, "are seldom deficient in that talent."

"But we find our match sometimes," returned the lady with a bow.

Sir Atheline came close to them ere they were conscious of it, and by the look of meaning in his face they doubted not his having overheard their opinion of his acting.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"And were thy words indeed but subtle feigning,
Had'st thou no love to give for all I've given?"

Sir Atheline, however, could afford to smile. The single look at Claudine's lovely face, the touching sorrow it expressed, and the bright tears that filled her soft blue eyes, convinced him that she loved him. He understood at once that she had been piqued by his declining to attend her evening party, and had revenged herself in petulant anger by professed reluctance to act with him.

If she decided that he should still represent Jasper Carew, he trusted they might succeed better on another occasion. He saw that she played well with Thornycroft, because she was indifferent to him, and he was not jealous of the exhibition of this superior skill.

What would she do now? Would she decline to act with him and choose another Jasper Carew? He felt that he should be very indignant if she were to do so; yet he was aware that he was every day more enthralled by her charms, her youth, her seeming isolation, her ill-concealed preference for himself.

But Helena—what a scoundrel he was towards her, in this devotion to another woman! Like the drunkard who cannot refrain from one more debauch, and vows that after that he will forswear wine for ever, Sir Atheline declared that no sooner were these theatricals over than he would leave England for some weeks, and only return in time to fulfil his destiny by marrying Helena.

For some hours Sir Atheline waited at his club, hoping that Mrs. Fairlight's footman might bring him a note. He grew irritable and restless from the delay. "Perhaps she means to look out for someone else. This unknown will put his arm round her waist; she will lean her head on his breast." He stamped his foot with jealous irritation. At length the note

reached him, and he tore it open eagerly. It ran thus :—

"——— Square, *June* —, 18—.

"Dear Sir Atheline Vernon,—

"There seems to be some difficulty in supplying your place in the 'Wolf in Sheep's Clothing;' so if you can vanquish your reluctance to oblige the company, I, with the rest, shall feel grateful for the concession.

"Yours faithfully,

"Claudine Fairlight."

"What a strange note!" said the young man discontentedly. "How stiff and measured—how unlike the glimpse of her bending forward, her graceful figure, her eyes full of tears, her hands folded on her bosom. Ah, Claudine! 'woman's at best a contradiction still.'"

On the following day he called at half-past eleven, and sending up his card begged for an interview. He was shown into the drawing-room and requested to wait till Mrs. Fairlight left her bedchamber.

She came at length, followed by her maid with a tray containing coffee and rusks. There were two cups, and Mrs. Fairlight desired Finette to remain and pour it out.

Sir Atheline took a cup, not because he wished it, but to get over the awkwardness of the interview, which he imagined she had intended to make less embarrassed by a friendly meal.

"I am glad Thornycroft is not here," he said; "he would want all the best coffee, as he insisted on having the strongest tea. That was on my first visit to you. You were very good to me then."

"And have I not been good to you since?" she asked, not meeting his eye.—"Some cream, Finette."

"No; you were very disagreeable when I came here to rehearse. You made me look ridiculous, and led Mrs. Lingster to think I was a stupid dolt utterly incapable of acting."

"But perhaps there may be some ground for that opinion," said the lady, smiling mischievously.

"If so, as you have accepted my services, you are bound to help me a little. I came to ask if you would rehearse for an hour with me before we have another lesson in public."

"Yes, certainly; we will make Finette sit down with the book in her hand and prompt us, when we have finished our coffee."

This was not exactly what Sir Atheline expected; but he could not complain, and his eyes wandering round the room, turned involuntarily to the statuettes, and those of Claudine followed them.

"Yes," she said, "they are very beautiful. And Captain Thornycroft was very anxious to know if another boxful had arrived from Paris; and if so, who had had the honour of presiding at the unpacking."

"Yes?" said Sir Atheline.

He wanted to know if she had mentioned his name as the donor, but she made no answer to the tone of his interrogatory.

"Shall I remove the tray, madam?" asked Finette.

"Put it down on that table, if you can find

room," said her mistress, and come back and take this book in your hand; when I hesitate or use a wrong word you must stop me, and do the same to Sir Jasper."

The maid did not dislike being placed in the office of preceptress, and the rehearsal went on swimmingly,

> "For each resumed the unembarrassed brow,
> Recovering what they lost, they knew not how."

And both Anne and Jasper threw themselves into the spirit of their parts.

Where Jasper rushes from his confinement and snatches Anne in his arms, she put him back. "In rehearsal this is unnecessary," she said.

"Then how can I tell if I do it properly?" said the young man discontentedly.

Where she says, "You will own I play my part bravely," he replies, "Did I not know thee to be one of the purest and truest of women, I should judge thee a very cockatrice of coquettes." This was said in the latter part of the sentence with so much meaning, that the "purest and truest of women" was lost in the bitterness of the reproach of coquetry.

Claudine looked up into his face pleadingly. The restrictions she had placed on their intercourse he believed arose not from a wish to do right, but from a motive less pure.

He said in his assumed character, "Kiss me, my brave, cunning rogue!" but warned by her previous objection, he made no effort to carry out the stage directions.

She goes on to say, "We poor, weak little women, have some strength in us after all;" and she uttered the words with a determination which Sir Atheline understood.

Jasper continued bitterly, "'Fore God, I believe you women would coquet with Jack Ketch —Anne Boleyn did so."

Anne says towards the end of the interview, "You know not what I suffer." He replies, "Do I not know! when I hold you thus in my arms, I say, perhaps it is for the last time, and then I cannot let you go. Why these tears, dearest?"

"*Because I love you! Oh! how I love you!*"

There was a tremor in Claudine's voice as she

uttered these words, which went to the heart of one of her hearers. She threw off the expression of real sensibility, saying coquettishly, "We have done that much better now. I think we shall bring down the house with our simulation. And now you shall have some luncheon."

Sir Atheline assented, and they descended to the dining-room. He seldom had any appetite in the morning and did not eat luncheons, but he hoped to be alone with Claudine, for he imagined that she could have no excuse for keeping Finette with her.

He gained nothing, however, by his assent. The butler and footman waited during the whole of the luncheon, tempting the jaded appetite with spiced dishes and delicate wine. Claudine took only some broiled chicken and water.

"Do you drink water on principle?" said Sir Atheline.

"No," said Claudine, "from Inclination, that charming guide; for I was brought up in the country, and the recollection of Devonshire's 'white walls and glittering springs'—of the old stone well and the long green grasses growing

around it, made me think the water drawn from its depths more delicious than any 'sweet poison of misused wine.' I once tasted champagne, but it gave me headache, and I preferred the clear spring water which did not."

Sir Atheline wondered at her ignorant preference, and put it down to not knowing better. He dared say that Helena would be just as uninformed and foolish.

"Fancy good wine hurting anyone!" he thought, not suspecting that the powers of his digestion were daily succumbing under its repeated application.

It was vain to expect to be alone with Mrs. Fairlight he perceived. There was no excuse for returning to the drawing-room with her. He sighed as she arose, and said, "I hold it fit that we shake hands and part."

"Yes," she continued, smiling,—

> 'You your business and design you may point to,
> For every man hath business and design such as it is.'

What may be your business and design?"

Sir Atheline meant to go to Park Street and spend two sober hours with Helena. The con-

sciousness that Mrs. Fairlight might not approve the reason of his visit, made him continue to hold Claudine's hand, whilst he looked pleadingly into her eyes.

The look said, "Do not remove your hand in anger and cast me off for ever."

Claudine caught with feminine quickness that there was something concealed. Where could he be going that he did not answer? Then the report of his engagement to a beautiful young lady, educated by his mother, flashed on her memory, and made her cheeks turn pale and crimson again tumultuously.

The servants had left the room, and the lady and her departing guest were standing near the door.

She said, in a voice so unnatural as to be scarcely recognised by herself, "Where are you going to spend the next two hours—in Park Street? I have heard some idle story of your being engaged to an heiress with a large fortune."

"*That* is not true," said Sir Atheline, in the tone of a reprieve.

"Then you are *not* engaged?" asked Claudine eagerly.

Sir Atheline was silent.

"Speak," she said, imperatively.

"I am engaged," he replied with an effort.

She flung his hand away passionately, and rang the bell.

"The door, Sir Atheline Vernon," she said when the footman appeared, and with a ceremonious curtsey she passed him, and ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Forgive thy friend and heed it not
Should anger prompt his quick replies:
It may in future be thy lot
To miss the light of those dear eyes."

Sir Atheline went into the street with a flushed face, and a head giddy from conflicting emotions. That Claudine had treated him most rudely on an insufficient reason was that which swayed him most. What right had she to do so? I never professed love to her. There was no bond between us. It was shameful. Then his consciousness reproached him. There was no spoken word between them, but they knew the love which reigned uncontrolled in the breast of each other.

Should he have been pleased had she received the confession of his engagement with smiling indifference? No. He knew that had she done

so his anger would have been infinitely greater. He went off to Park Street with a mind preoccupied, and challenged Helena to chess, that he might have time to think, whilst he seemed to ponder on the best way of breaking his adversary. However, he was not permitted to arrange his thoughts in peace. Mrs. Rosemary had purchased a new dress, which she said her dear husband would have liked, because it was scriptural, being like that of Joseph, a coat of many colours. But a dress gives no pleasure unless it be admired, and the little plump lady walked up and down the room once or twice in rustling majesty to attract the attention of Sir Atheline, whose eyes, cast down, were irritated and distracted by the quick glancing folds of silk, which were of a rich purple, flounced with orange-tinted satin, with a heading of crimson. As he did not speak, Mrs. Rosemary addressed him.

"I've got a new dress, Sir Atheline. What do you think of it?"

Sir Atheline, though good-natured, generally after dinner or luncheon, had not partaken of either of those soothers of an irritable brain,

where the stomach has craved for and received the usual so-called support. So he had to make an effort to answer civilly.

"I think, Mrs. Rosemary, that it is in every way worthy of you. It reflects the charming taste that fashioned it, for I can answer for your deserving all the credit for that splendid apposition of colours."

Mrs. Rosemary tossed her head and simpered, and was delighted with the supposed compliment.

"You are right, Sir Atheline; the young woman wanted me to have the purple trimmed with black, or a black trimmed with purple. 'My dear!' says I, 'there's some folks who think they do their duty by being sorrowful, and stick to their mourning as if nobody could go to heaven in a coloured dress. Why, only see how they bedizened the priests and the ark in the Old Testament, and if gay colours were sinful Solomon wouldn't have dressed up the temple so smart—blue and scarlet. Then, again, one of the chosen race had a coat of many colours, and if a coat, why not a petticoat?' But," she

added sadly, "'tis no use for me to look well, I know no one in London out of this house, and I sha'n't be sorry, Sir Atheline, when you marry Miss Vernon, and then I shall go back to my little cottage, and have a friend or two to speak to, and to know when a body is well dressed."

A dead silence followed this speech. Neither Sir Atheline nor Helena knew how to look unconcerned. He felt that it sank like the voice of doom on his ear. Helena thought she had acted unwisely in putting it off so long, but she could not be the person to suggest that it should be hastened.

That she had flung a bombshell between them never suggested itself to that worthy woman. She determined to take off the appreciated dress, thinking to herself that Sir Atheline was but a cold sort of a lover. Mr. Rosemary would not have heard such a speech in inactivity, —she should have a nudge, or a wink, or a kiss in return for such a reference to future bliss.

Sir Atheline said at length, with a forced

smile, that Mrs. Rosemary must be aware that the delay was not his wish, but Miss Pevensy's.

"Oh! yes, I know that," said the lady, willing to exonerate the young bridegroom elect. "It is all Miss Helena's love for a black dress. Really, really she would sell her title for a bombazine gown. Now to sell one's birthright, I mean title, for a mess of pottage I can understand—so savoury. Do you know it always made me hungry in church when my husband read about it, specially in the morning service, for we always breakfasted early. But do, my dear! do be married quick, out of hand, for then I shall have a good slice of plum-cake: and a slice of wedding cake and a good glass of port wine have no equals in niceness in my opinion. Plenty of almond paste and frosted sugar," she added, placing one fat hand on Sir Atheline's arm impressively. "No cupids made of chalk, dancing in bowers of artificial orange blossoms. No—no—all shall be *real*. The love to begin with, and the wedding-cake to be cut up at the end of the ceremony. I'll speak to Lord Gower as soon as he

comes back, and he will let me have the ordering, for 'tis the lady's side of the house that provides the cake and the house linen."

Here Mrs. Rosemary sat down by the door to consider the subject, and Sir Atheline, looking up and seeing she had not left the room, would willingly have presented her with five sovereigns to save him from a *tête-à-tête* with Helena.

Mrs. Rosemary was thinking that she might have the privilege of purchasing the linen, and was calculating quietly in her own mind what profit she might make out of the bargain, with some supplementary queries as to whether Wilmot might not have the right of purchase.

Helena wished she would go. Perhaps Sir Atheline would urge her to marry him sooner—perhaps immediately. She wished he would. She would make but little objection. Then she should get rid of her vulgar companion. She was so occupied by these thoughts that Sir Atheline managed to check both her king and queen with his knight.

"You will not care to go on?" he said.

"Yes, I should," said Helena, who feared he would go as soon as the game was over.

"You can think very little of my play to think you have any chance of winning after you have lost your queen," said Sir Atheline with something of a sneer.

Helena answered quietly, "A drawn game is possible, or I might win a stale-mate."

"Well, you young people seem to use the strangest language!" said Mrs. Rosemary. "I've heard you talk of check-mate, and that I understand, but why one should have a stale-mate is past my comprehension."

The players went on in silence. Helena was piqued into playing her best, to redeem her former loss. Sir Atheline was glad to seem absorbed in the game. Mrs. Rosemary had helped him out of his difficulty in some degree by lingering so long in the room. When she left it she only waited to deposit the new dress in the wardrobe, before she returned to the young folks, as she called them. Not a word had been uttered in her absence, and Helena was playing with the greatest caution. When

her attention was exerted hers was a brain that in its tension could beat that of her antagonist, for Helena was a water drinker, and a clever woman by nature, and though not superior in natural mental capacity to Sir Atheline, she gave her brain more chance of health. Towards the end of the game, Helena had but her king and a pawn high up on the board. Sir Atheline had a castle and king. Helena craftily tried to work up her pawn into the region of queening. Sir Atheline impatiently checked her king continually, which she avoided by dodging behind her pawn. At length it wisely struck him that the game would never be concluded unless he brought up his king to the attack. The first time Helena was left unchecked she pushed on her pawn, following it up with the king. Before Sir Atheline's king could come up he perceived that in the next move Helena's pawn would be made a queen. There was nothing to be done but to take it and sacrifice his castle, thus making it a drawn game.

Sir Atheline started up, pushing away the board, and upsetting some of the men. He

stooped to pick them up with something of an oath under his breath, and then just touching Helena's outstretched hand, with a bow to Mrs. Rosemary, he ran down stairs, and rushed into the open air. His feeling towards his affianced wife was one of distaste, if not of dislike.

N.B.—Persons tenderly attached should not play chess together.

When he was alone he shut himself into his sitting-room, and desired his valet to deny him to any one who might inquire for him. He thought over his prospects. His engagement to Helena, who was in person so beautiful, in mind so cultivated, in principles so assured, in prudence so inflexible. He knew that she loved him. He judged her to be in every respect Claudine's superior. Married to Helena, his happiness and welfare would be assured,—but should he be happy? Should he not

> "Yawn his joys, and thank a misery
> For change though sad"?

A thought of that charming face, so beautiful in its quivering anger when she curtseyed to him

in high disdain, would ever present itself between Helena and himself.

He was fearfully beset, and such was Sir Atheline's love of self-indulgence and ease that he felt a momentary dislike to both ladies for the trouble and mental disturbance they occasioned him.

END OF VOL. I.

BRADBURY, AGNEW, & CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

